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AS CHRISTIANS FACE RIVAL RELIGIONS

AN INTERRELIGIOUS STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

By Gerald Cooke

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AS CHRISTIANS FACE RIVAL RELIGIONS

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To David Bainton,
Mark Julian, and
Johannes Christopher.

Preface

Speaking as the author, I wish first to convey to the following persons my appreciation for assistance: the editorial board of Haddam House for its initial encouragement in the planning of this book; the Director of Association Press, Mr. James Rietmulder, who supplied helpful counsel during its writing; three of my colleagues at Oberlin College for reading and commenting on parts or all of the manuscript in its early stages—Professors Walter M. Horton, Clarence H. Hamilton, and Edward L. Long, Jr.; and my wife, Brigitte Cossmann Cooke, who provided invaluable assistance in the final revision of the manuscript. Needless to say, the author alone bears responsibility for the book as it now stands.

I have not written primarily for the few specialists in the emerging field of interreligious affairs; nor have I written for trained theologians, most of whom are more able than I to come to grips with the theological aspects of rivalry among religions. Yet I covet acknowledgment by the former that my efforts have not been fundamentally misinformed or shallow (despite the brevity of the book); from the latter I can only hope to elicit more active recognition of the legitimacy and urgency of the theological and very practical task represented here.

This book has been written for the already overburdened

intelligent layman and concerned college student, in whose charge lies heavy responsibility for the character and scope of interreligious affairs in the years ahead. It is not only the avowed Christians who have a stake in the issue before us. Persons who are either not sure that they wish to be classed as Christians or are fairly sure that they do *not* wish to be so classified must also become increasingly aware of some of the larger implications of this problem. Christian and non-Christian alike must recognize that if a creative and constructive solution or way of working toward a solution of the problems of rival claims among the world's religions is not forthcoming, the "One World" prophesied by Wendell Willkie twenty years ago will not be consummated. The world's living religions hold immense potential for keeping alive the hope for peace among men of good will and for moving humanity toward that high goal. But it is safe to say that these potentials cannot be fully exploited unless men and women of different religions find ways of working more fruitfully with their divergent claims to religious truth.

Fortunately, the Christian church realized the profound importance of rivalry among religions more than three decades ago. In the International Missionary Conference of 1928 in Jerusalem the main theme focused on the spiritual values in non-Christian religions. Since then, the growing urgency of the encounter between Christianity and other world religions has called forth weighty and sometimes heated discussion in missionary conferences and in assemblies of the World Council of Churches. Little has been done, however, to alert those in the churches and outside who do not follow closely the workings of the ecumenical (world-wide) Church. It is hoped that the book at hand will help to fill this lack and that it will stimulate intelligent concern with the issues as Christians face rival religions.

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Introduction to the Encounter

Christians in the modern West face a dilemma: how should we react to the reality, vitality, and claims to truth of non-Christian religions?

Although it has a peculiar novelty that stamps it "URGENT," this dilemma is not absolutely new. As long ago as the second to fourth centuries A.D. the Church Fathers (expounders and literary defenders of Christian faith and life) gave much attention to heathen religions and philosophies. Names like Tertullian, Origen, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria come readily to mind. They sought to relate—in some instances to reconcile, in others to distinguish—Christian and pagan conceptions, and to defend the gospel against attacks or distortions. In the course of these efforts they exhibited a remarkable interest in and knowledge of non-Christian points of view.

A millennium later, in the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, Christendom was seriously challenged by Islam. Its *negative* response was the Crusades. The failure of these misconceived and ill-starred ventures and the subsequent fall in 1453 of Constantinople to Muslim armies caused widespread alarm in the Christian community. A few like Martin Luther expressed a genuine desire to understand more of the re-

ligion of these "infidels," who stood at the very gate of Christian civilization.

Occasioned in part by Christianity's confrontation with Islam was the more radical and persistent challenge of classical humanism; for the *positive* response to aggressive Islam was the appropriation by Christian scholars of long-lost Greek and Roman classics which had been preserved largely in Arabic translations. The resulting Renaissance humanism set the values of classical man and his culture in direct competition with Christian faith and its focus upon God as the source of all value. This challenge has not yet run its course, despite the many and persistent efforts of Christians to respond creatively to it.

Again, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the discovery and translation in Europe of Chinese and Buddhist classics was a kind of "sneak preview" of our situation today; it profoundly impressed a number of influential intellectuals with the moral nobility and subtlety of pagan cultures. For the great majority of believers and observers, however, this impact filtered down slowly through the protracted study of pagan cultures by generations of scholars; it is being widely felt only in our own time.

The New Element in the Present Situation

The novelty of our dilemma lies in the fact that since the days of imperial Rome Christianity *as a whole* has been neither forced nor encouraged to take other religions seriously. As far as the majority of believers is concerned a kind of religious Monroe Doctrine has operated to maintain Christianity's freedom from serious religious competition in the West. This fact has conspired in turn with the more fundamental fact of a seemingly inherent claim of Christian faith to superiority and finality to insulate Western Christianity against any real urgency about the problem of religious

rivalry. Today, however, our situation has changed; and we face the dilemma on a new scale and with a new urgency. The challenge of humanism, whether in its Graeco-Roman or Renaissance form or in some modern dress, is perennial for a significant number of persons. Now, however, Christians who have resisted the truncated outlooks of various types of humanism are face to face with full-fledged religions. The right relation of men to God and the supernatural, the issues of death and immortality, and the religiously sanctioned moral code can no longer be regarded in the West as the exclusive domain of Christianity or of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Complicating Factors

The dilemma to which this book addresses itself is complex as well as new. Its peculiar complexity lies in the fact that Christians are not only unprepared by experience to face the challenge of non-Christian traditions and faiths: we are not quite sure how to respond to the claims of our own faith! The background of this uncertainty is seen in what we may call the "liberal evolution." It refers to the fairly gradual but nonetheless profound alteration in the religious climate in the West during the past three hundred to four hundred years. Names like Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus call to mind the declaration of independence of the natural sciences from older and religiously sanctioned conceptions: as a result of the "Copernican Revolution" the view of the world (cosmology) as earth-centered (geocentric) was displaced by a cosmology which is sun-centered (heliocentric); and the rise of modern science was under way. Geological discoveries of the composition and age of the earth, Darwin's biological studies in the evolution of species, the theories of Freud and other psychologists and psychoanalysts—all these and more

have entered the lists to contest the validity of Judeo-Christian teachings about God, man, and the world.

Fruits of the "Liberal Evolution"

One need not contrast the medieval thought-world with our own to demonstrate the extent of the liberal evolution. Think only of the difference in religious and philosophic temper in the days of New England Puritanism and today. We may sing about "that oldtime religion . . ." for fun, but the majority of us in Europe and North America cannot seriously affirm that what was good enough for the pioneers in this respect is good enough for us. Efforts at strict conformity to a biblical norm of all aspects of daily life—including dress, amusement, and so on—absorbed the energies and devotion of large numbers in former generations. Today the religious dimension of life is restricted for many of us to weekly church attendance and some kind or degree of loyalty to "Christian ethical standards." Yesterday's watchword of "winning souls for Christ" now reads, "raising living standards in 'backward areas' "!

In other words, what was formerly oriented toward the reality and character of God and of Christ—theocentric and christocentric, to use theological terms—is now by and large man-centered (anthropocentric). Most of us are less concerned with "bringing all men to Christ" than we are with bringing Christian ideals into action toward all men. We tend to think of lives of Christian service less in terms of pastoral or missionary callings than of medical and educational programs. We are, on the whole, less given to speaking of the Name by which all men must be saved than we are to affirming the value and sufficiency of each man's and each culture's tastes and traditions. The commitment of earlier days which could and often did give rise to intolerance and disparagement of heathen beliefs and practices is widely

replaced by an ostensible objectivity which insists on each man to his own. The drive to convert others to Christian faith is superseded for many by a "post-Christian" skepticism which finds itself unsure of the traditional claims of Christian faith.

So it is that Western Christians of the midtwentieth century find themselves faced with a new and complex dilemma. We have behind us a long history of Christianity as the virtually undisputed agency of religious authority for the majority of persons; it is a history which knows no challenge from non-Christian cultures and religions fully comparable to that of the twentieth century. We have within us, however, something of the spirit of scientific objectivity and philosophic and religious neutrality which pervades modern life in the West. And as we struggle to make a meaningful combination of these two components of our own background, we are confronted by other religions and their claims to be true and effective ways of salvation. We must "find ourselves" in terms of our religious faith—conscious of our commitment and of how this commitment relates to the world around us; we must also reach a workable consensus on how the claims of Christian faith are related to the claims of other religions.

Questions for Christian Faith

This book, then, attempts to state the kinds of problems which are posed for Christian faith as we in the West are year by year brought into more intimate contact with the religions of non-Western peoples. It attempts to give initial guidance and to clarify the reader's thought on such questions as these: How are we to resolve the conflict of claims to truth and value which are advanced by the various faiths of mankind? Does the Christian have a mandate to stand firm in an exclusive claim to final revelation of absolute truth? Or is the

Christian under obligation to seek common ground with non-Christian religions, to take a stance of tolerance and to advance only relative claims to truth and value? What are some of the views of these problems which have been stated in recent years, and what are some of their strengths and weaknesses? Is there any policy of interreligious affairs, any approach to the divergence of religious claims to truth which does justice to all concerned? Can community be achieved among different religions without compromising what is distinctive in each?

A solution of these questions along constructive lines will require the earnest and thoughtful attention of responsible Americans, however they may come to understand their religious commitment and its relation to the world around them. The chapters that follow are designed to help in discharging this responsibility.

Aims of the Following Chapters

Rivalry in claims to truth among religions is first and last a religious and theological problem. Chapter 1, therefore, seeks in very brief compass to set the problem in this primary context by relating it to the contemporary religious situation in American life.

Religious rivalry also has its "worldly" side. In Chapter 2 a sketch is given of some of the historical forces that have brought it to its present pitch of urgency.

Against the religious and historical backgrounds outlined in the first and second chapters, Chapter 3 begins to focus on specific aspects of the Christian's encounter with world religions. It describes the confusing results of identifying similarities and differences in the religions on the basis of superficial and uncritical knowledge.

Chapters 4 and 5 presuppose that accurate knowledge of religions is indispensable to honest encounter. They seek to

demonstrate the need for more serious and sympathetic study of world religions as a necessary step in dealing adequately with religious rivalry. Points of similarity and difference are examined now more deeply to illustrate the need for more than superficial acquaintance and premature judgments if we are to appraise realistically the comparisons and contrasts among religions. Only on this basis can we make accurate judgments about what the truth claims of the religions actually are.

Our search for the right approach to religious rivalry moves into a new phase in Chapters 6 and 7: the experts are called to testify. Views on how Christians should look upon and behave toward non-Christians are drawn from leading figures of Asia and the West. These experts fully appreciate the necessity of more serious and accurate study of religions than is now carried on. Their counsels are fundamentally divided, however, due to sharply diverging points of view. Evaluative comments on the experts show the impossibility of taking one of them alone as guide in the questions of interreligious relations.

In the final chapter an attempt is made to strike a path between extreme liberal and conservative standpoints in making proposals for a policy of interreligion. The counsels of experts are drawn upon where they are in agreement. Conditions and forces which operate in the contemporary world are also taken seriously. However, it is the religious and theological component in the total picture which is decisive in pointing the way toward community without compromise of conscience and religious faith.

The "solutions" which are offered are not solutions at all but basic attitudes and operating procedures deemed to be prerequisites of a solution. The difficulty and complexity of the issues involved make it unlikely that the final chapter

will galvanize concerned Christians into full consensus in this matter. Yet the book will have served well if it at least brings home to a larger circle the reality of a radical challenge which simultaneously faces the Christian community and has vital significance for the total community of mankind.

1. The Examined Faith and World Religions

The Religious Context for the Encounter

The Christian's approach to non-Christian religions is intimately connected with the larger picture of contemporary religious life in this country. Just as precious stones are best appreciated when placed in settings suitable to their quality and character, the fact of world religious rivalry is best understood when placed in its religious context.

Popular Interest in Religion

One of the features of major importance in that context is the amazing receptiveness to religion today. The fact that America is in the throes of a "religious revival" is borne home to us from many quarters. This book is not designed to describe its myriad popular forms. Excellent recent treatments of these matters are available.

There are, however, several highly significant aspects of this religious awakening which have received too little notice. There is scant recognition, for example, that current popular enthusiasm for and preoccupation with religion takes both native and alien forms. One's first thought about the quickened interest in things religious refers to indigenous forms

of religious experience and expression. One thinks of the revivalistic or evangelistic efforts of men like Billy Graham and the throngs which fill stadiums to hear him. Or, there are the phenomenal successes of such widely divergent figures as Bishop Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Oral Roberts on radio and television.

Much less obvious is the fact that *alien* forms have also come into the new heyday of religious participation. Never since the Chicago World's Fair and the World Parliament of Religions in the 1890's have Oriental religions had such a ready hearing in America. Numerous sects and cults sprung from the major religious traditions of Asia have infiltrated the American scene. And while they may stand last in a census of church membership, their mounting impact is significant. Not only have alien traditions and cults become a fad in more sophisticated sectors of the population—it is a badge of acceptability in some circles of suburban, college, and "Bohemian" life to show acquaintance with Indian *Vedanta* philosophy or with Japanese *Zen* Buddhism; the religions and philosophies of the East have also drawn into their service creative writers and scholars like Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Gerald Heard, and Alan Watts; and leaders in abstract painting like Mark Tobey and Jackson Pollock have found inspiration in the rhythm and balance of Chinese calligraphic painting.

These data give rise to yet another pertinent observation on the religious revival: they suggest a very great readiness these days to clutch at things religious. There is a readiness tinged with anxiety in which many persons seek to recover and cling to old and established forms of American religiosity, while another significant group is equally ready and eager to leap into avid acceptance of new and exotic forms. Taken together both reactions seem to indicate what is perhaps a too easy and too uncritical identification with religion

in America at this time. The general insecurity and lack of reflective thought about religion is demonstrated in the fact that many are loath to undertake a critical evaluation of the existence of multiple systems of belief, ways of life, policies, and issues which characterize our time. The shreds of living faith and commitment are for many so fragile that any proposal for rigorous examination of problematic aspects of religious life is shunned: "Better to cling to the little that is left to us than to jeopardize it in attempts to mix faith with understanding. We want answers, not questions." So, at least, speaks one segment of the current movement toward religion.

It would be a mistake, however, to allow the impression that what has been said characterizes adequately the religious revival since World War II. Religious interest today is not all of one piece. There is for one thing a depth of concern and a sharpness of critical inquiry that characterizes the discussion of religion on many college campuses and in at least a few vital churches. The earnest inquiry into religion in these quarters frequently touches the full range of pertinent considerations—from the study of the Bible and church history, to the nature and structure and function of religion, to theological and philosophical examination of belief and conduct. There is evident here a sober endeavor to penetrate with understanding the stuff of religion and the substance of Christian faith and tradition; it is an endeavor which stands in vivid contrast to much current religiosity. Whatever degree of anxiety and personal insecurity may be involved in such religious interests it is counterbalanced by a genuine search for meaning and a willingness to do some hard thinking.

The large number of serious books published in recent years is both a stimulus and a response to this more reflective interest in religion. Miscellaneous books and publications are dealing with central issues of Christian faith. Several laymen's

series grapple with the problems involved in relating Christianity constructively to modern society—such focal matters as the nature of man, the Bible, the Church, vocations, sex and marriage, religion and politics.

There is nevertheless a serious gap in the reflective interest in religion. Comparatively little attention has been given to problems arising out of the confrontation of Christian faith with non-Christian faiths.[1] Why is this so? It is due in part, of course, simply to lack of awareness; the full implications of the claims of other religions have not yet been felt. More fundamentally, however, this problem has not received its due because it involves questioning on the most radical level, and this is anathema to most people. When the dentist's drill strikes near the nerve of a tooth we jump—and let the dentist know in one way or another that he is to stay away from that tender spot! In like fashion we tend to be very sensitive and defensive when discussion and questioning approach the nerve centers of our faith.

We may find, for example, that inquiring into the nature and message of the Bible or the nature and function of the Church has its difficulties: theological questions of interpretation come into play, and we may feel discomfort and insecurity when our own accepted interpretations or our denominational outlooks are challenged by others. But at least we feel some reassurance in knowing that we are arguing about something we have in common; different views of the Bible and the Church are kept in the family. The various interpretations start from shared assumptions about the right of Bible or Church to stand in some sense at the center of our structure of value and authority.

When we begin, however, to look into the confrontation of Christian faith with other world religions, our theological nerve centers are exposed; we experience the pain of having basic assumptions and cherished beliefs called into question

by divergent assumptions and beliefs. On top of all this our interrogators and sometimes aggressive challengers are "foreigners"!

Nevertheless, the confrontation is real, and some kind of response is unavoidable on the part of those of us who are persuaded that an examined faith is the only really viable way for religion in the modern world. If our interest in religion represents the more reflective aspect of the current religious revival; if it reflects a religious commitment which earnestly seeks to understand itself both in itself and in its relation to the world it lives in, we shall not be able to ignore the patterns of commitment in non-Christian religions.

Responsibility for the Encounter

Could we not "let George do it"? One of the most common attempts to evade this responsibility is to ask whether these are not questions to be assigned to Christian missionaries. Since the foreign missions are closest to the problems of rivalry among religions, the argument runs, missionaries should take the lead in developing acceptable and workable ways of responding.

On the face of it this suggestion may appear to have merit: those who are most immediately exposed to difficult problems of human relationships have the best basis from which to speak on them. Some might be willing to say, for example, "Labor knows labor's problems and needs best; therefore laboring people should determine what legislation should be enacted to deal with the situation of laboring people." The same can be said for management—at least by those committed to management's point of view—or for the military establishment in the Pentagon, or for something else.

There are three reasons, however, that this kind of thinking fails. First, it does not give due weight to the interplay and conflict between self-interest and general interest. In

other words, we may ask, Who on second thought would contend seriously that labor or management or the armed forces or any other group in American life should be given a blank check? Human experience tells us immediately that such a course of action would in most cases lead to self-aggrandizement by the group concerned. To put the matter in terms of basic political science, some kind of balance of power is necessary as a check upon self-interest by any particular group. Or, speaking theologically, an awareness of "original sin" should make us wary of letting anyone or any group write their own ticket of rights and responsibilities in human society.

These statements may sound too harsh toward those who actively serve in the missionary calling, or they may suggest a lack of confidence in their integrity. In actual fact, what has been said about the need to check self-centeredness is neither of these. To observe that the phenomenon of overweaning self-interest calls for vigilance does not challenge the personal integrity, the conscious honesty and fairness of those involved. It points instead to the depths at which sin works, and it assumes that missionaries in the field would be the first to acknowledge that they, like the rest of us, are sinners—forgiven sinners: that is why many of them have become missionaries, to spread the gospel that God in his incalculable love and mercy forgives sinners.

The second reason has to do with a kind of mental myopia to which we are susceptible. Those who are closest to a situation are often prevented from taking a longer and larger look at some of its features. If it is true to say that one does not fully know or understand an institution, tradition, or organization without becoming part of it, it is also true that one may be so intimately bound up with one's responsibilities that some of their aspects or implications are blocked out of the picture. We understand more fully, we get a better perspec-

tive on our tasks and on our rights and responsibilities if a genuinely interested outsider has an opportunity candidly to express his own impressions of our work or our status. Fresh insights may come from those who are not "all wound up" in our particular project but are seriously concerned both with us and with our project. It is like the friend who drops in while you are nobly struggling with a do-it-yourself job and offers suggestions which had not occurred to you as you worked.

So it seems wiser to try to combine involvement and distance in seeking satisfactory solutions. Sensitive and informed co-operation is necessary between those who are fully involved at close range in the confrontation of world religions and those who are not. Of course missionary personnel must participate fully in the search. It is the men and women most intimately involved in world missions—pastors and educators in the field, administrators of mission boards and societies, native Christians of mission lands, scholars of missiology—who have wrestled with the problem longest; their wealth of wisdom and experience must be regarded as among our most valuable resources for meeting this challenge. Yet it is equally clear that they cannot be asked to bear the burden alone. Those of us who are still in some measure observers from a distance of the day-to-day confrontation of religions on the mission field must seek insight into the meaning and implications of this confrontation. The responsible judgments of those who are not yet fully engaged in the Christian–non-Christian encounter are required to give balance and perspective to the depth that is provided by overseas mission personnel.

A third reason that the solution to the dilemma of rival claims to religious truth cannot be left to missionary personnel alone appears to move in the opposite direction from what has just been said. However, it is not in fact contradic-

tory to assert that in a very fundamental sense the division between missionary and nonmissionary believers is poor theology. Every sincere worshiper and committed person is a missionary, a witness, whether he knows it and likes it, or not. Foreign missionaries themselves repeatedly express the longing that every Christian would realize his missionary role in America, in the congregations of "sending churches" where witnesses to inspired faith and life are needed quite as much as in the "receiving churches" overseas. Furthermore, the biblical figure of the "body of Christ" has not lost its relevance. (See, for example, I Corinthians 10:16 and 12:27.) By this forceful phrase the New Testament speaks of the interdependence, the community and sharing of *all* members and parts of the Christian community. Christians and congregations of Christians are somehow drawn into a new unity in which they are in a real sense parts of one another and sharers of the blessings and burdens of Christ. Otherwise their professions mean little, and the promises of God are vain and of little effect.

Summary

Coming to grips with Christianity's encounter with world religions involves first of all an awareness of the religious context in which that encounter occurs. We find ourselves at this point in history in a situation which has been characterized as a "post-Christian" era and as an era of religious revival. Although these characterizations may seem to be mutually contradictory, both are grounded in undoubted facts: on the one hand, religious life in America is in the throes of a many-sided revival, partly in response to tragedy and evil in recent history; on the other hand, long-accepted ways of thought and action in the "Christian West" are radically challenged, partly in response to the world religions

and their claims to truth. It is this challenge in particular which must be brought closer to the center of attention as a theological and religious issue of the first magnitude. It surely must receive serious consideration within the more reflective wing of our religious revival, which takes its cue from the venerable Socrates' insistence that the unexamined life is not worth living. The *examined faith* is highly prized by those who are aware of the unity and wholeness of selfhood; they are unwilling to live compartmentalized or fragmented lives in which the religious dimension is sealed off and confined. But those who are willing to inquire into and seek understanding of even the deepest concerns of human life and destiny must now assay the question, How does the faith by which I live relate to the claims of other religions? This question is as crucial to Christian self-understanding in the modern world as are questions of biblical interpretation and theological teaching. It is a question which ought not and cannot be left to the handful of busy laborers in far-away vineyards. Every alert and serious Christian shares full responsibility with his missionary representatives in other lands for providing an intelligent and authentically Christian answer to the problems of rivalry among the world's religions.

NOTE TO CHAPTER 1

1. Notable exceptions include: Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute; the Relation of Christian Faith to Other Missionary Religions*, "The Christian Faith Series" (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958); Edmund Soper, *The Inevitable Choice: Vedanta Philosophy or Christian Gospel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1957); Kenneth Cragg, *Sandals at the Mosque: Christian Presence Amid Islam*, "Christian Presence Series" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); Philip Ashby, *The Conflict of Religions* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

Also Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Christian Dialogue with Other Religions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

ADDITIONAL READING

(These suggestions at the end of each chapter are intended as a supplement to basic sources cited in the notes.)

Recommended accounts of the contemporary religious revival in America are: A. Roy Eckardt, *The Surge of Piety in America* (New York: Association Press, 1958); Martin Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).

2. One World in the Making

The Historical Background for the Encounter

Religion cannot be studied reliably in a vacuum. Nor can particular problems of religion be properly understood in the context of religious phenomena alone. The Protestant Reformation, for instance, cannot be fully studied only as a religious phenomenon. Its principal figures and events and theological achievements cannot be adequately appraised apart from the larger historical context in which they emerged. In a similar way the problems of encounter and rivalry among religions on a world scale must be related to some of the historical forces which have been instrumental in creating these problems.[1]

Western Penetration of the Orient

How has it come about that the peoples of the world find themselves now virtually on one another's doorstep? One of the major causes is certainly the Western penetration of the East. No one above the grammar school level has not heard about Western colonialism. From India through the Middle East, across North Africa, and throughout the African continent to South and Central America, and now the Caribbean

—from nearly around the globe come the drum beats and even the gunfire of anticolonialism, anti-imperialism, movements of national self-determination. "Throw the British out!" and "Yankee, go home!" have become rallying cries as familiar as the campaign slogans of national elections.

A new nationalism is abroad in the Middle and Far East, sprung from the loins of Western political, economic, and religious penetration. Britain's economic penetration of the non-Western world is a familiar story. British colonial and imperial status was well reflected in the nineteenth century boast that the sun never sets on the British empire: wherever the sun shines on the globe the British were there. Whether by fair means or foul, whether by trading companies or military and political conquest, Britain established herself and until World War I remained "monarch of the seas."

Less often and less clearly recognized, however, is the extent to which other Western nations competed for the colonial plums. Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal also pursued vigorous policies of colonial expansion. Within more limited spheres Russia and Italy must also be mentioned, as well as the U.S.A. Though most of America's expansive tendencies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were confined to the Western Hemisphere, she was also involved in the nineteenth century economic dismemberment of China.

China offers a good example of Western penetration of the Orient. For here no less than six established Western powers vied for special economic and diplomatic privileges in order to exploit her trade resources. More pertinent, however, to our understanding of the spirit and mood in which the confrontation of cultures and religions has come into focus in the last generation are the *attitudes and reactions of Asian peoples* to Western penetration.

Again China may serve as a case study and prime example

of Asian reaction to Western hegemony. Professor H. G. Creel has characterized the Chinese reaction to Western invasion in terms of indifference and aloofness followed by a paradoxical combination of enthusiastic embrace and passionate rejection of Western culture and values.[2] According to Creel, during the first centuries of Western intrusion (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries) the predominant attitudes of indifference and aloofness stemmed from a conviction of cultural superiority: nothing the West could offer the Chinese approached their refined enjoyment of life and their traditional culture with its concerns for personal and social well-being. The Westerners by contrast seemed little more than barbarians; their material, technological, and military advantages were uniformly scorned. By the nineteenth century a dramatic reversal in these attitudes becomes evident; there is a pronounced swing toward embracing a large measure of things Western. By the twentieth century, however, the Chinese attitude toward the West has matured in a way that paradoxically combines both the negative and the positive elements from earlier periods. Influential circles of Chinese students and intelligentsia move further and further toward rejection of liberal democratic (bourgeois) ways and values and toward acceptance of extreme ideological products of Western culture (Marxism).

The result of this development over 500 years is painfully clear today: a vigorous Communist state holds power over the mainland, exerts great influence in Southeast Asia, and exhibits implacable hostility to the non-Communist West. The Chinese have seized the tools forged in the West which promised to bring them by the most direct route to a position of equality with the great powers of the West.

What is of special interest and importance for the purposes of this book is that the present state of intense rivalry between China and the West is essentially of our own making.

We fostered for centuries an assumption of Western superiority over the "backward" and "incapable" Chinese, seeing them only from a particular and provincial Western viewpoint. As Creel explains, the Chinese for their part did not completely fend off these ideas and feelings through their aloofness and sense of superiority; they actually internalized them, transforming them into conceptions and feelings of *in*feriority. Then came the feverish drive to overcome the sense of inferiority by disproving it. And today Communist China pounds insistently on the doors of the UN, expands without serious hindrance at the expense of her neighbors, challenges her sister-state of Russia with a philosophy of world revolution by war rather than by "peaceful co-existence" or "economic competition."

The same scheme of analysis cannot be applied unaltered to other areas of imperialist and colonial penetration of the East by the West. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to trace some of the same ingredients in the more or less controlled and disciplined nationalist movement in India and in the explosive confusion of African and Middle East nationalism. According to Vera Micheles Dean, an able specialist in world affairs, if there is one point which we can legitimately regard as the nerve center of the anti-Western revolt, it is less the *fact* of Western ideological and technological penetration than the *manner* of it. Sir John Glubb Pasha, military tutor to Jordan and builder of the tiny but justly famed Arab Legion, identified the Achilles' heel of Western policy in the Middle East as "superciliousness."[3]

This one trait of Western interaction with alien cultures can be identified throughout the non-Western world as the sharpest goad to anti-Western feeling and action. If what the West has to offer—in social and religious and broadly humanitarian ideals and in superior industrial and military technology—is attractive to most Oriental peoples, the air of

superiority that has consistently accompanied these exports is unpalatable. Vast populations outside Europe and North America voice a common sentiment: "We want your achievements and we need your help; but we cannot longer endure your assumption of inherent and all-inclusive superiority."

It is not to be thought, of course, that Western pride and convictions of superiority have been the sole cause of disruption in these ancient cultures. Transition to new and unfamiliar modes of life, to new conceptions of the world, to new sets of cultural and spiritual values could never be easy and without incident. More conservative elements in any society will cling to the old and familiar ways with great tenacity. The tensions which now fill the atmosphere in the rising young nations and nations yet to be born would have existed in some degree under any circumstances. But the bitter resentment by Afro-Asians of Western airs of superiority has immeasurably aggravated a naturally difficult situation. Under present conditions those forces in the underdeveloped countries which seek to further the process of Westernization must overcome not only conservative reluctance but also their own sense of humiliation before Western scorn and condescension. Moreover, our overbearing attitudes provide an easy pretext and smoke screen behind which local leaders can sometimes ruthlessly exploit the genuine needs and hopes of their peoples.

The Impact of Technology

The confrontation of cultures of East and West has been brought about in large measure by the aggressive Western penetration of the East during the last five hundred years. The revolutionary reaction of the East threatens to turn this confrontation into a head-on collision. The momentum with which both penetration and reaction have proceeded is due to yet another set of forces: the technological miracle. In

recent years observers of the world scene have stressed what the historian Arnold Toynbee calls "the annihilation of distance." All of us are at least vaguely aware that our globe has shrunk!

A moment's recapitulation of the revolutions in communications and transportation during the past half-century brings this fact into clearer focus. Where once we spoke of world travel by weeks and days we now speak of hours. At the threshold of manned space travel in excess of 18,000 miles per hour we are enabled to move from continent to continent and from culture to culture in a matter of several hours. Prior to the first transatlantic passenger flights in 1939 sea passengers on the fastest liners could expect to leave New York City one day and arrive in France four to seven days later. Today jet passenger flights take us from continent to continent overnight. A sea voyage from a U.S. port to Japan in 1939 took thirteen days: today, actual flying time to Tokyo via the polar route is eleven hours.

No less important is the extensiveness of intercourse between cultures. If to the startling changes in the rate of locomotion (and the speed with which these changes have come upon us) a consideration of the volume of international travel and exchange of information and goods is added, the significance of the technological revolution becomes more impressive. The revolution in communications has meant that today hundreds of millions on one side of the globe are aware of developments and events on the other side before a day has passed. Revolution in the means of production has combined with the new transportation facilities to permit an increase in overseas trade. These and other aspects of the technological miracle of our century mean that men as well as machines and materials have passed between cultures in ever greater volume. Against this background it is little wonder that in 1940 a presidential candidate could capture

the imagination of millions of Americans with his vision of a single interdependent world. Nor is it surprising that America's senior philosopher, William Ernest Hocking of Harvard, foresees what he calls *The Coming World Civilization*—so fantastic are the recent advances in man's conquest of his physical environment and the cultural exchange and interpenetration which it fosters.

The Role and Results of Christian Missions

If the present encounter between religions cannot be understood rightly apart from nonreligious historical forces, the context of historical forces is not complete without the element of religion itself. The influence of religion upon the present revolutionary situation in the world is reflected in two closely related phenomena: Christian missionary enterprises among the non-Christian peoples; and countermissionary efforts by non-Christian traditions and cultures.

Missionary activity from West to East began almost immediately after the East was opened to the world by the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorers. And until very recent years its tempo and scale and scope have been increasing. As long as actual political and economic expansion was going on in the form of colonial and imperial demonstrations of power, missionary activity frequently proceeded apace. There are instances in which missionary agencies have been subservient to the other arms of this movement. At other times—especially the last generation—missionary spokesmen have sought to disengage their own enterprise from the larger and more worldly undertaking of Western exploitation of Eastern lands.

More significant than a résumé of historical associations and developments, however, is the fruit of these endeavors. In many instances missionary units were purveyors of Western social and political and economic ideals almost as much as

proclaimers of a saving religious message. For example, a more or less clear conception of minimal and ideal standards of living were carried with most of the missionaries. If these standards were not implied in the comparatively luxurious diet and living quarters of most missionary personnel, they were inculcated by medical programs and social service projects. Where there were no hospitals to foster higher levels of health and sanitation, educational institutions often served as windows through which models of Western conceptions of human welfare could be observed. Here too ideas and convictions of civil and political liberty were examined and extolled. No longer could the *status quo*, the inherited political philosophies and institutions of non-Western cultures stand as the only option for Oriental peoples in the task of organizing public life.

One of the strongest elements in this whole picture is that of religious and moral teaching and preaching. All that was progressive and constructive in Western political, economic, and social philosophy was supported by conceptions of God, man, and the world: the world is the creation of the wise and benevolent God, who has pronounced it good and has intended that man should subdue and enjoy it as a divine trust. Man is created in the divine image, and this is the deepest and strongest root of the common humanity of men. Men are equal too in their tendency to inaugurate and to perpetuate a broken relationship with their Creator: they are all sinners. Yet they remain the supreme concern of God in all his creation.

These conceptions were taken seriously by African and Oriental peoples, even though the number of actual converts to Christianity remained extremely small. They afforded a kind of cosmic rootage, a metaphysical and religious sanction for the political and economic and social ideals being

commended to these peoples. And although few would commit themselves to Christianity, the inescapable universalism of Christian faith enabled them also to be inspired by the vision of Christianity and to demand that professors of Christianity practice what they preach.

This is the first result of the Christian world mission which is important for an understanding of the present situation of religious rivalry between East and West: American democratic ideals, the emergence of the American and French republics through revolutions fought in the name of justice and freedom, and the Christian insistence on the inestimable worth of men before the redeeming God—all these elements implied or expressed through missionary activity ignited the flames of popular unrest in many areas outside Europe and North America.

A second harvest from the seeds of missionary activity deepens the irony of East-West relations. Not only must the West now come to terms with the vigorous nationalisms of a largely westernized Near and Far East. It must also give care and attention to the renascence of ancient religions in all parts of the world, a reawakening in which the presence of Christianity has played at least a catalytic role. Not only has Christian missionary activity contributed markedly to Afro-Asian independence movements by providing a religious rationale and sanction for revolutionary ideals. It also has been a primary influence in calling into being religious revivals within Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam which often constitute both a reinforcement of anti-Western sentiment and a missionary counterattack.

The resurgence of vitality in these three living religions alone is as complex as it is profoundly significant for life in the modern world. During the last 150 years, and especially in this century, these great religions and cultures have in-

creasingly felt the turmoil of self-awareness and self-criticism. Reform movements have appeared in an attempt to appropriate the new or to reclaim the old. Rumblings of change in both directions within Hinduism have been paralleled in Islam and somewhat less clearly evidenced in Buddhism. And these emergent trends have been elicited in large measure by the challenge of an aggressively missionary Christianity.

In Hinduism, for example, the work of Ram Mohun Roy, 1772–1833, was designed to foster a more progressive Hindu piety and practice. Roy took seriously Western and Christian criticisms of such "backward" and "superstitious" aspects of popular Hinduism as *sati* (the immolation of the surviving widow upon the funeral pyre of her deceased husband) and the use of image and idol in worship. The accommodation to Western norms and values which his *Brahmo Samaj* movement required of Hindus was counterbalanced, however, by reaction. If some of them were stung by outside criticism and exhortation into reform along Western lines, others reacted in a mood of defensiveness. The *Arya Samaj* called essentially for a return to fuller participation in what was peculiarly Hindu, regardless of the offense this gave to non-Hindus. The more reactionary type of religious reform inaugurated by *Arya Samaj* has naturally gained powerful support through India's independence. The struggle for freedom led by prophet-patriots like Gandhi and poet-patriots like Tagore generated a sharper self-consciousness among Indians and a deeper sense of cultural identity. The reappraisal and the new appreciation of India's ancient cultural achievements that proceed hand in hand with Indian nationalism cannot fail to revitalize much in the religion of India's past for vast numbers of its people—so difficult to disentangle are the realms of religion, culture, and national feeling.

Thus, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hinduism was

awakened to new life largely through encounter with confident and critical representatives of Christianity and Western democratic values; it bestirred itself to new attempts at self-understanding, both friendly and unfriendly to the counsel and ridicule of sojourning strangers from the West. It stands today as a proud and vital tradition, a formidable rival of other living religions.

A third kind of development which characterizes the renascence of Hinduism also stems in large (if hazily defined) measure from Christian missions; and again, the counterparts to Hindu responses can be traced with some of the same outlines in Islam and Buddhism. This is the missionary zeal and activity which has increasingly appeared in all three religions. Though in their classic and historical forms they have not been so dynamically and centrally missionary in character as Christianity, these religions have nevertheless generated countermissionary movements to the West. The missionary outreach of Hinduism, for example, arises in the figure of Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886). A man of little learning but phenomenal religious sensitivity and spiritual capacity, Ramakrishna sought to taste the fruits and gain the nourishment of non-Hindu as well as Hindu religiosity. He soon claimed that in a mystical way he had experienced all that was available to the earnest adept in Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. As an apostle of the essential unity of all religions, Ramakrishna became the inspiration of efforts to proffer the religious wisdom and *Vedanta* philosophy of Hinduism to the West. Thanks mostly to the indefatigable efforts of his first and learned successor, Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's teaching was introduced to America at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 at Chicago. Although Vivekananda's strenuous endeavors to transplant *Vedanta* Hinduism to the soils of America and Europe came to an end in

his death at the age of thirty-nine, his work has continued. Numerous able expositors of the universal validity of Hindu thought and experience (among them, for instance, Swamis Nikhilananda and Prabhavananda) have journeyed westward to spend themselves in lecturing, writing, and translating Hindu classics. A kind of neo-Hinduism is now preached and taught in terms most readily understood by the Western mind in over a dozen Ramakrishna mission centers in the United States. A traditionally nonmissionary Hinduism finds itself today represented far beyond the borders of Mother India, even as within those borders the struggle to identify "true Hinduism" in the context of the modern world still goes on.[4]

Any intelligent attempt, then, to grapple with questions of interreligious affairs requires at least this: we must be aware that the complexity and difficulty of understanding popular revolutionary ferment in India, the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia is compounded by the presence of indigenous religious revivals and efforts at missionary outreach. The Christian cannot rightly understand or accurately interpret his world without coming to grips with militant non-Christian faiths. And this means that the Christian can no longer remain oblivious to rival claims to religious truth, for the very simple reason that other religions will not permit it. They are once again alive and aggressive forces which draw support from national and cultural self-consciousness.

* * *

With these elements of recent history before us we can readily acknowledge their significance for the problems of world religious rivalry. When the American West was in the early stages of settlement it did not matter much to folks in Ohio how those misguided people out in Utah believed and lived. But when the frontier reached the Pacific Ocean and

the land in between filled up with settlements it mattered mightily how the group in the next valley believed and regulated their lives.

So today, when we have seen the dimensions of space and time drastically reduced, we can no longer pass off the hundreds of millions of Orientals as poor benighted heathen or as swarthy and romantic "natives." Where formerly we might have afforded the hollow luxury of ignoring foreign ways of life and views of man's destiny as primitive and superstitious, we must now take them seriously and endeavor to understand their strange ways. Inflamed by a new nationalism (mainly of Western origin) which many of us had begun to think outmoded in the modern world; and newly awakened to the achievements and convictions of their forefathers, the bursting populations of nearer and further Asia demand to be heard in the councils of the nations and to be represented at the shrines of faith and culture.

In viewing together these diverse historical forces of one world in the making, one must avoid the temptation to an imperialism of the mind. Engineers tend to think of social problems in mechanical terms, businessmen in public office want to run the government according to commercial and corporation patterns, and economists are tempted to propose solutions to complex problems using economic data as *the* key. This is natural: we tend to come to terms with challenges primarily by means that are most familiar to us. Nevertheless, we must both resist the temptation to identify the problems of interreligious relationships as the one key to productive and harmonious international affairs and accord religion its proper importance. Man's problem situations are so many, so varied, so complex that no clear priority can be assigned to any single aspect. What is claimed in the present discussion is simply that the issue of rival claims to religious truth and value play a crucial role in the larger question of

interreligious and intercultural understanding, as this in turn bears directly upon world community and peace. The religious and cultural dimensions of our situation relate quite as fundamentally to the goal of a peaceful and co-operative world as do the military, political, and economic aspects. The present world situation in which Orient and Occident are becoming engaged in a fateful confrontation must be traced to religious challenge and response as well as to Western colonialism and the technological revolution.

In the years ahead, therefore, we shall do well to become more thoroughly familiar with the facts of interreligious as well as international and intercultural life. As the problems of these several areas are interconnected in their genesis, they are not likely to be lastingly and justly resolved in isolation. The ancient adage, "Know thyself," cannot be dispensed with; nor can it stand alone. It must be expanded to include a very deep and penetrating knowledge of our world and our world neighbors if we are to discharge effectively our responsibilities as citizens of a progressively interdependent world. Our growth in knowledge of ourselves as persons and of the basic principles and governing mechanisms of our society must be refined and enriched by a growing acquaintance with persons, principles, and ways of other societies. Perhaps in this way—certainly not without it—we may be given that self-knowledge of the deepest and broadest sort, upon which right and creative judgments may be reached. As our educational endeavors push forward in all fields that affect directly our national life, it is imperative that we gain a new degree of proficiency and a new depth of understanding of alien forms of life with which we must increasingly deal in the future. And on both fronts, at home and abroad, the study and understanding of religion has a rightful place. Its historic role in the rise and growth and interaction of cul-

tures, and its present involvement in the transformations which now sweep the world, demand our intelligent attention if we are to have one world rather than none.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. A more detailed and very useful treatment of East-West interpenetration is now available in Hendrik Kraemer, *World Cultures and World Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960).

2. *Chinese Thought, from Confucius to Mao* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

3. Vera Micheles Dean, *The Nature of the Non-Western World* (New York: The New American Library, 1957).

4. In terms of active personnel in America these missionary endeavors are minute. Yet their impact is disproportionate and growing. Hindu efforts emanate mainly from Ramakrishna centers in large cities and from the Vedanta Society of Southern California near Hollywood. Their bi-monthly magazine, *Vedanta and the West*, seeks to demonstrate the relevance of ancient Indian wisdom to modern Western life. Muslim missionary activity is less easily identified as authentically Muslim; neither faction of the *Ahmadiyya* reform and missionary movement is fully accepted by ancient centers of Islamic piety and learning. *Ahmadiyya* is small but vigorous throughout the world, building mosques in principal American cities (including Washington, D.C.), and publishing periodicals, tracts, and books. (See C. S. Braden's article on Islam's mission to the West in *Religion in Life*, Summer, 1959.) Buddhism fits still less easily into the traditional Christian conception of a missionary faith. Yet the presence in the West of native and alien apologists, and the work of publication, advance significantly the claims of Buddhism to universal validity. The Buddhist Lodge in London, the British-American writer Alan Watts, and the foremost English-writing Buddhist scholar, D. T. Suzuki, together offer an impressive publication record in which one form of *Zen* Buddhism

predominates. (See, e.g., Watts' *The Spirit of Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1958); and Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism*, essays edited by W. Barrett (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956).

ADDITIONAL READING

Able accounts of world missions are abundant. Among them are a general historical introduction by E. R. Hardy, *Militant in the Earth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); a fine short interpretative essay by Charles W. Forman, *A Faith for the Nations*, "Laymen's Theological Library" (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); the many books on missionary themes by Bishop Stephen Neill; and excellent discussions of special problem areas of foreign missions are found in the "International Missionary Council Research Series" pamphlets, published by the Student Christian Movement Press in London.

The best single treatment to date of the resurgence of Asian religions is found in R. J. Manikam, ed., *Christianity and the Asian Revolution* (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1954). Shorter reports include a set of articles in the quarterly journal *Religion in Life*, Autumn, 1956.

3. A Little Familiarity Breeds Confusion

The Encounter Imperiled

The religious meeting of East and West must be seen by Americans against the background of the religious scene in contemporary America and of the historical forces which have contributed to a revolutionary and revitalized Orient. Certain currents of thought and action which at present can influence the character and outcome of the encounter must also be taken into account. Recent decades have produced countless organizations and agencies designed to promote international, intercultural, and interreligious community. Any serious proposal for the ordering of interreligious relations will want to take advantage of gains already made in these areas. It will also want to avoid any weakness in popular efforts toward world community which might imperil a fruitful encounter between Christianity and other religions.

Popular Efforts Toward World Community

That we are in important ways a world-minded generation, no one can deny. In spite of the fact that modern man is heir to a lethal legacy of international hostility and resentment, our century has been characterized by a drive toward

greater understanding among the world's peoples. The League of Nations may be only a sad memory, but the United Nations Organization is a functioning reality. The various UN agencies are in no small measure the fruit of myriad private as well as governmental efforts throughout the world to foster constructive communication across national boundaries. The popular ground swell of internationalism has achieved expression in America in many ways: the service committees of several religious groups—including Quakers, Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, Congregationalists, Unitarians, and others—have been engaged both in actual relief and reconstruction work overseas and in seminars and institutes on international conditions and problems; widespread popular support has been given to such government-sponsored ventures as the Marshall Plan and the Point Four Program; experience of living in other cultures is facilitated for high school and college students by organizations like the Experiment in International Living and the American Field Service; and the burgeoning of foreign study programs in colleges and universities is strongly motivated by a conviction that international understanding may be advanced in this way.

The Motive of Fear

What is the source of this enthusiasm for, or at least concern with, the question of how nations and cultures relate to one another? Beyond doubt, one of the stimuli is fear. Much of the sense of urgency about the question which has risen to full crescendo since World War II clearly has its source in fear: fear of man's new powers of destruction has brought us to the stark realization that if we cannot learn to live together we shall surely die together! Throughout the world we hear statements like "War is unthinkable" and "There is no alternative to peace." The need for international

understanding is proclaimed and reiterated constantly. Except for the strident voices of a relatively small number of conservative and reactionary groups, "internationalism" is unmistakably in vogue at midcentury, and part of its strength lies in fear of the consequences of following an opposite course.

The Motive of Moral Idealism

It is equally certain that the drive toward world understanding did not originate in the postwar era or even in the present century. Its source and sustaining spirit stems also from the moral idealism and the humanitarian liberalism of the West. From the deep springs of Western civilization in ancient times men's imaginations have been quickened by visions of the good and blessed society. The mighty stream of idealistic and humanitarian work toward a world community of men and nations today has been fed by tributaries too numerous to recite. The divine-human community of justice and peace to which the Hebrew prophets called their people, and the coming kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed; the great new republic and the universal brotherhood of men envisioned and taught by Plato and the Stoics; these and other classic sources of vision and hope have inspired latter-day theorists and experimenters to seek for the pattern of a co-operative, just, and warless society. History has exposed the utopian and unrealistic character of some of these theories and experiments—for examples, the Oneida Community in New York and the Brook Farm venture in Massachusetts. History has also exposed the naïveté and the staggering costs in human life and values of attempts to bring to reality the classless society of Karl Marx. Yet the failures and errors of these and other extreme expressions of men's idealistic and humanitarian vision of world community have not destroyed the vision. It continues to exercise and inspire the present genera-

tion. And it is plain that a policy of interreligion can hardly renounce the basic intent of the vision or fail to profit from its impetus.

The Danger of Sentimental Internationalism

Any interpretation of interreligious relations must appreciate weaknesses as well as strengths in the current struggle for world community. Though it appropriates motive power from the ancient sources and the immediate urgency of the struggle, it will scrutinize critically the spirit and the assumptions which underlie these efforts. One weakness in particular requires extended attention since it constitutes a special danger to a right understanding of interreligious relations. This is the fairly simple and straightforward thesis that colors much popular thought and action for freer exchange of persons and ideas among countries. It is the thesis that more contacts and mutual exposure of persons of different nations and cultures lead directly to greater mutual understanding and co-operation among peoples. In so many of our efforts we seem to have adopted the title of Anna's delightful song, "Getting to Know You," in *The King and I* as our theme in working to improve international relations. It is as if we had taken our favorite remedy for resolving tensions at home or in business—"getting better acquainted" or "talking things over"—and had applied it to the international scene. "The more we get together the happier we'll be!"

Is this procedure really dependable? Is it not possible that mere exposure of persons to alien cultures and ways of life might lead to something other than felicity and harmony? A little familiarity in this situation may not always breed contempt, but it often breeds confusion. Like the proverbial "little knowledge," it is dangerous.

Indeed, there is ample evidence to show that for every individual or group that has gained in understanding and

personal enrichment through acquaintance with another culture, others have confirmed or deepened their prejudices by such experience. For example, many members of the British foreign service grew contemptuous of Indian culture in the days of British rule in that great subcontinent. Or to bring it closer to home, the experience of American service men in Europe illustrates the point. Many a returning soldier in the 1940's spoke disparagingly of France and of French life. Once the fabled charms of "gay Paree" were extolled, further comments usually indicated a very negative reaction to other aspects of French life which did not accord with a particular version of "the American way." It was only those blessed with either innate sensitivity or previous training and preparation who were able to appreciate the subtler achievements of French culture.

More Than a Little Familiarity

These confused if not contemptuous responses to alien cultures suggest that more than simple exposure is necessary to promote better understanding between peoples. The optimism and the idealism that have motivated much well-meaning effort toward world community are shallow and inadequate to the task. Something more is needed than the simple thesis that familiarity breeds understanding and promotes good will. A stable world community requires more than tourist fare, curiosity, and good intentions. It requires more than the vaunted American traits of generosity and friendliness. It requires forethought and effort, honest self-scrutiny, and not a little of the grace of humility and a willingness to listen and learn.

* * *

These observations upon attitudes and actions toward international peace and stability are also valid for popular efforts

toward interfaith understanding. As there seems to be no reasonable and fruitful alternative to international understanding, so we have little choice in the matter of interfaith relationships. If political and economic isolationism is not a realistic option in an era of internationalism, religious isolationism is also passé. Non-Christian world faiths are living realities. We become aware of them through their representatives on university campuses, in the news and books and magazines, and through prize-winning movies. They will not be ignored. Their challenge of the Judeo-Christian faiths to a deeper mutual knowledge must be faced.

The crucial question is, How shall we go about it? Does a little familiarity breed any less confusion in interreligion than elsewhere? The need for a realistic conception of the necessary conditions for international understanding is matched by the need for a clear appraisal of the task of interfaith relationships. Christians are likely to be thwarted in attempts to meet responsibly the challenge to interfaith understanding if they are informed and motivated merely by vague curiosity and sentimental good will. In other words, the danger that casual acquaintance or a little familiarity will breed confusion or contempt is just as great in relations among religions as among nations. Especially in a day when snippets of knowledge of other religions can be had in paperbacks at any newsstand, the pitfalls of this danger must be identified if we are to respond wisely to the challenge of other world religions.

The Shock of Similarity

One pitfall which often catches the Christian unaware may be called the "shock of similarity." In this reaction to a little familiarity with other religions the Christian tends to be much impressed by what seem to be duplications of elements usually assumed to be unique to Christianity. To be sure,

this is not a new or surprising reaction. Some of our grandparents faced similar perplexities when archeologists began to uncover religious texts of ancient cultures of the Near East. Cries of anguish were heard from pulpits and pews when stories of the Creation and of a Great Flood appeared in materials from the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys: "How are we to explain this?" they wondered. "Does it not rob the Genesis accounts of uniqueness and therefore of authority for Christian and Jewish believers?"[1]

Yet the present reaction to seeming parallels and duplications in other religions is slightly different, and it may be more agonizing. It may be more painful because the supposed parallels or duplications are turning up in *living* religions. Men and peoples are actually living by the views of the world, the conceptions of deity and man, and the ethical codes in which those likenesses occur. To come upon these things in the remains of cultures long dead (Assyrian, Babylonian, Ugaritic, and others) is one thing. To come upon them in the scriptures of world faiths which militantly challenge Christianity today—Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam—or even in "residual" Confucian and Taoist teachings honored among the Chinese and Japanese: this may be more difficult to handle.

Christians have experienced the "shock of similarity" in the discovery in non-Christian scriptures of a kind of Golden Rule. Five centuries before Christ Confucius developed an ethical principle called *jen*. The "man of *jen*" or the morally superior man acts toward others with fellow feeling, with brotherly concern, sympathy, "humanheartedness." Drawing upon a concept with related meanings (*shu*, reciprocity or altruism), Confucius formulated this teaching negatively in what has been called the "Silver Rule": Do not act toward others in ways that you do not want others to behave toward you. He also utilized the Chinese term *chung* (loyalty, rec-

iprocity) to state his teaching in the more positive form of a "Golden Rule": Act toward others to fulfill their desires and needs just as you would have others act toward you.

These formulations accord well with Jesus' teaching: "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." What is one to make of this? Is the implication that the authority of Jesus Christ and the Bible is reduced when the uniqueness of ethical statements is undermined? Or does the Christian infer from such parallels that a kind of universal core of ethical teachings can be extracted from the various religions and that therefore one is not significantly more authoritative for believers than any other?

Or what is the Christian to say to the Hindu who claims an incarnation in his own tradition? Christians have been accustomed to regard the incarnation of God in Christ as of the very essence of their faith. However difficult this doctrine is to explain fully, its centrality and its uniqueness have been affirmed since the first Christian century. The Hindu finds this strange. Hindu tradition tells of numerous instances in which the divine has taken on human form. In the *Bhagavadgita*, the "New Testament" of many Hindus, it is announced that the mighty Lord Krishna comes into the world to restore order whenever chaos and disorder threaten to overwhelm mankind. Indeed, Krishna himself is an incarnation, a "descent" of the Lord Ishvara, but only one in a series which includes a dwarf and a tortoise!

Do not these things raise fundamental questions in our minds? "Was God in Christ decisively, as the New Testament declares? Is not the very essence of the Christian salvation claim, the heart of the good news, shown here to be only a syndicated story? Are we justified in sending missionaries to preach a gospel of the incarnate Lord in a land already overstaffed with incarnate Lords?"

The "shock of similarity" may also await Christians who think of endeavors to practice human brotherhood as distinctively Christian. The ideas of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men have been staple items in the diet of liberal Protestantism in America. It is sometimes unnerving for the unsuspecting Christian to discover that human brotherhood finds a prominent place in many world faiths. Hindus and Buddhists, for example, have their own version of the brotherhood of all men in terms of either the oneness of Soul (Self, *Atman*) in all beings or the common lot of suffering. Even more dynamic, however, is the Muslim emphasis on the brotherhood of all men irrespective of racial, ethnic, economic differences. All men owe their first and final allegiance to Allah, the one true God: no man of whatever rank or station stands higher than another before Allah, except in his religious and moral achievement.

It is this particular doctrine of Islam which is helping to win converts at a breath-taking rate in colored Africa, while "Christian America" agonizes over the problems of sending black and white children to the same school. Perhaps Islam can claim in this way to fulfill the Christian vision of brotherhood and neighbor-love just as the New Testament community believed Jesus Christ to be the fulfillment of Hebrew-Jewish expectations of a divinely sent Messiah.

* * *

A little familiarity with non-Christian religions very easily breeds confusion. In response to supposed parallels or duplications of this kind Christians may turn to sheer relativism. This often leads in turn to either religious indifference or to the enthusiastic espousal of a synthetic universal religion. That is, reacting in terms of the "shock of similarity," Christians may experience the pain of seeing cherished notions of the uniqueness or absoluteness of their faith undercut. These

persons, accustomed to a certain authority pattern in religious belief, feel the threat of disillusionment: "Perhaps Christianity does not show us *the truth* after all; one religion seems to be as good as another."

Or the reaction may take a more positive form, as when persons recover from the initial shock to welcome enthusiastically the parallels: "Why all this hand wringing? For the similarities we can only be grateful; they underscore the common ground of world religions; they show the way to a world community of religious faith in which any differences must wither away as unworthy impediments to realizing the true and fundamental unity underlying all religions."

The Shock of Difference

A second pitfall along the way of little knowledge, the "shock of difference," frequently plagues the Christian in efforts toward greater understanding of world faiths. If some are impressed by similarities and are moved to either a reluctant or an enthusiastic relativism, others are appalled by differences and react in an opposite way. Compare the Christian emphasis on love with certain Buddhist formulations. Christians are trained (however ineffectively) to put a premium on concrete human relationships and to guide them by love. As Jesus makes *agape* or self-giving concern for other persons central in his life and teaching—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"—so the apostle Paul hymns the superiority of love to all other features of the Christian life (I Corinthians 13); likewise John stresses the commandment "love one another" (I John 3:23). In the Christian view genuine love between persons is the *sine qua non* of citizenship in the Kingdom, in fullest and deepest fellowship with God and men.

Some statements attributed to the Buddha, however, may suggest that for Buddhists active and genuine love of another

person is bad: it leads not to enlightenment but only obstructs the Buddhist's freedom from the world of desires and pain. "Those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain." "He who cares for no others, who has no relations, who controls himself, who is firmly fixed in the heart of truth, in whom the fundamental evils are extinguished, who has thrown hatred from him: him I call a Brahmin [one of highest spiritual achievement]."[2] These sayings attributed to the "Light of Asia" seem to be saying that the way of salvation is negative in the extreme: refrain from human relationships, do not seek to establish them. Seek not involvement with persons and the world in active and outgoing concern: sever every fetter. The tie that binds one to another in love is not a blessing but a curse.

Reactions to such divergences are sometimes extreme: "Can there be any constructive relationship between Christianity and pagan teachings so antithetical? Can one realistically expect to understand and appreciate an outlook which is the very opposite of one's own?" Or: "If the Buddha as well as Jesus was divinely inspired, we can have no confidence in either of them. In view of the unbridgeable divergence in their teachings we would do well to eschew *all* religions and their claims to truth."

Another occasion for the "shock of difference" comes to Christians who are true to their biblical heritage in affirming the goodness of the created order. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:1 and 10). Man's life in the world is to be prized and its many blessings accepted in thankfulness. His whole person—body as well as mind and spirit—is the legitimate object of active concern as a gift of God. Thus, a "healthy this-worldliness" balances the indispensable "other-worldly" concerns of classic Christian faith.

A little familiarity with Hinduism can easily lead one to

conclude that the Hindu view is totally irreconcilable with this. There are Hindu schools of religious philosophy that have referred to the created order as *maya*, often translated as "illusion": the realm of everyday affairs and of history, all that is visible and subject to sense experience, the empirical world of the sciences—these are but a screen that "veils" true Reality. For things material and physical are at best temporary and of no vital significance; they are actually impediments to man's highest well-being; while Reality itself is mental only, spiritual exclusively. Nature and history are but the result of the deity's playfulness or idle sport (*lila*)! Therefore the beauty and order and magnitude of nature cannot rightly occasion the prayerful joy and wonder of a psalmist. Nor can the struggles of men and nations in the arena of history become the focal religious concern of a prophet.

If this is as far as one's acquaintance with Hinduism goes, one easily finds grounds for the commonly held view that Hinduism, as well as Buddhism, is incurably life denying and world escaping. The "shock of difference" may again give rise to confusion which expresses itself in sheer contempt: "There can be no 'peaceful co-existence' with such aberrant heathenism. The only relationship that Christianity can sustain with it is one of conflict! Contact with the revealed truth of Christianity can only expose its falsehood."

Finally, first impressions of ancient Hindu writings may convey the picture of a seemingly built-in moral laxity. Christians of whatever stamp are generally imbued with a sense of moral urgency. They are usually caught up in one or more "good causes," seeking to further the great struggle of good against evil, truth over falsehood. Confidence that the right will win in the end—even if for some that end is projected beyond history—and that the moral imperative is sure and

eternal: these are common assumptions or affirmations of Christians.

Little wonder that Christians become perplexed and even contemptuous by a measure of familiarity with certain aspects of Oriental thought and life. Hinduism often seems to be saying that Truth sanctions no such frenzied moral struggle as engages the Christian. In the "larger view" or on a "higher plane" (favorite phrases of Hindu spokesmen) good and evil are to be accepted as equally necessary sides of a single coin. So we read in the *Upanishads*—those remarkable, if obscure, reports and speculations of ancient Hindu sages—that the wise man will rise above the distinction between good and evil, will be unconcerned with questions of morality and immorality. "He [who has attained the higher knowledge of Reality itself] is not overcome by either the thought 'Hence I did wrong' or the thought 'Hence I did right.' Verily he overcomes them both. What he has done and what he has not done do not affect him." Possessing such knowledge the Hindu wise man rises above moral considerations: ". . . a father becomes not a father: a mother not a mother: the worlds not the worlds: . . . a thief not a thief. . . . He is not followed by the good, he is not followed by evil, for then he has passed beyond all the sorrows of the heart."[3]

* * *

Here are a few occasions for the "shock of difference." On first acquaintance with other religions one may wonder how they can possibly fulfill the functions of religion through such diametrically opposed means: "Can confidence in *any* religion be legitimately maintained when man's religious traditions are so divergent? Can one really be sure of one's convictions and beliefs when other persons and whole peoples are at the same moment basing their lives on assumptions

and principles and beliefs so contrary to them? Can we as Christians any longer claim with confidence that we are following the way of Truth when we find that men in other parts of the world make the same claims but tread quite different paths? Can 300,000,000 Hindus, 150,000,000 Buddhists, 300,000,000 Muslims be wrong?"

These questions may trigger a response either of negative relativism or of revulsion. In other words, a little familiarity with widely divergent aspects of other religions may breed the confusion in which one loses confidence in one's religious loyalty and perhaps in *all* religious claims. Or, the "shock of difference" may lead to outright contempt for all that is alien to one's own faith as sheer falsehood: "To tolerate or seek to understand such despicable statements marks only those of feeble faith. Condemnation is the only fitting reaction to these shameless perversions of the truth!"

A little familiarity with world religions does not take us far toward our goal of world community in depth. The shocks of similarities and differences and the confused judgments about religion which follow from them only imperil the possibility of fruitful encounter between religions. They provide an unstable basis for exploring fundamental questions like, How are we to comprehend the phenomenon of one mankind but many religions? How, if at all, can the claims to truth and value on the part of many religions be related meaningfully, fruitfully? What is a legitimate view for Christians to take toward other religions with all their similarities and differences and claims to show the way to man's redemption? Does the Christian have a clear mandate for the exclusive claim to final revelation of absolute truth in Jesus Christ? Or does the Christian have a clear mandate to seek common ground with non-Christian religions, to take a stance of tolerance and openness, and to advance only relative claims to truth and value?

If we are to speak to these questions at all we must go beyond initial and superficial acquaintance with other world faiths. Serious study is required. Its relevance will be explored in the following two chapters by examining some of the similarities and differences between Christianity and other religions in the fuller context of the religions in which they occur.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. See the discussion of this and other questions relating to the uniqueness and authority of the Bible in William Neil, *Modern Man Looks at the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1958). A somewhat fuller discussion by the same author is in *The Rediscovery of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).

2. Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1936), pp. 108–110.

3. These two passages are taken from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Translations of selected texts are conveniently available in Nicol Macnicol, ed., *Hindu Scriptures* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940); and in Swami Prabhavananda and F. Manchester, *transls.*, *The Upanishads* (New York: The New American Library, 1957).

4. Antidote for Confusion (I)

Difference Within Similarity

An initial or superficial acquaintance with other religions often fosters impressions of either marked and frequent similarities or equally pronounced differences among world religions. These impressions in turn promote in some persons reactions of jubilant affirmation that all religions are really the same; others may grudgingly concede this, protesting that their own religion is not so unusual after all and therefore probably is not so true as it claims to be; still others see radical differences painted in bold strokes across the canvases of different religions, concluding that religious truth-claims are too divergent to warrant commitment to any one religion or that their own religion should not have anything to do with the fundamentally alien and erroneous ways of life in other religions.

All these impressions and reactions are unsound and unsatisfactory bases for a fair and careful appraisal of religions. It remains for this and the next chapter to make a positive case for a more sober evaluation of the world's religions, their similarities and differences. This is necessary if we are to have a strong basis in accurate knowledge as we come face to face with rival religions.

Ideally, perhaps, all men and women of intelligence and good will would be well versed in the ways and religions of other cultures. In fact, however, it is precious few who know well and have a critical understanding of their own culture and religion, not to speak of those beyond our frontiers. It is to be hoped that the current spate of Christian laymen's religious and theological publications will significantly alter this situation, enlarging the creative minority of men and women who are not only consciously committed but also informed about their own religion. It is also a reasonable hope that the study of world religions on college campuses, and the rapidly increasing number of paperback translations of world religious classics will reduce the general ignorance of other religions.

Whether these steps in the right direction will carry us all the way to *understanding* is quite another matter. Religious classics like the Hindu *Bhagavadgita* and religious geniuses like Gautama Buddha do in a broad sense speak a universal language; to this extent they speak for themselves and on their own authority, and they evoke from us at least the awareness that other meaningful religious options exist. Yet this is not sufficient: neither religious edification nor simple awareness is equivalent to accurate understanding. The issues at stake are too great to permit satisfaction with personal impressions alone: there is no substitute for serious study. It is not a matter of whether or not we become acquainted with Muhammad or Buddha or Confucius, with selections from the *Qur'an*, the *Dhammapada*, or the *Analects*. The question is not so much "whether" as "how." How thoroughly and authentically do we understand what we read of religious classics that other peoples hold dear? A pious or curious browsing through the Hindu *Upanishads* may provide spiritual solace and uplift for some. But it is little better than dilettantism as far as the questions and issues of interreligious

relations are concerned; it may constitute a genuine peril to these relations. Whatever private benefits may accrue through reading that treasure trove of Chinese mysticism, the *Tao-Teh-Ching*, or any other scripture or religious classic, the question of religious claims and counterclaims to truth and the bearing of this question on such momentous issues as the authority of Christian faith, the conception of the Christian missionary task, and the possibilities for international and intercultural relations—these questions cannot be answered intelligently by this means. There is no substitute for thoughtful analysis, no alternative to honest endeavors toward a critical evaluation of the world's living religions if we are seeking more than a spiritual aspirin for the moment.

It is impossible to do more than stimulate the reader of this book to intensive exploration of his own and other religious traditions and patterns of religious life. Systematic and more or less detailed explorations of the complex and fascinating worlds of non-Christian religions are noted at the end of the chapter. The fruits and possibilities of serious study can at least be sampled, however, by demonstrating in somewhat fuller detail a more adequate approach to other religions than those outlined in the previous chapter.

Empathetic Understanding

Two related suspicions should be recognized and, if possible, allayed at the outset. From one quarter is heard the query (more often, the charge) whether religions can be understood authentically except by insiders, professing devotees of the particular faith-circle. From another quarter is voiced the view that only complete objectivity stands a chance of accurate understanding of religions: one is disqualified from the effort if one is committed to a particular religious faith and point of view; only by approaching re-

ligious systems and patterns of life in an entirely uncommitted and unprejudiced fashion can there be any hope of rightly "reading" these religions and evaluating their claims.

The view that an outsider cannot in the nature of the case get an authentic impression of another religion's meaning has a respectable history. During the boom period in the critical study of Asiatic religions in the nineteenth century many leading figures in the field came to hold this view. The scholarly term which most nearly represents the view under discussion is *Religionsgeschichte*. From the point of view of the discipline called "history of religion" many scholars believed that the best one can do is to describe from the outside as thoroughly and scientifically as possible all the features that are apparent to the outsider.

To reject this aspect of the *Religionsgeschichte* approach in the study of religions is not to deprecate its unique contribution to the cause of accurate understanding. The patient and laborious gathering and describing of facts, figures, and features of the religions have provided invaluable stepping-stones to knowledge of these traditions. But if we are to follow the lead of more recent developments in the study of religions, we shall discover that this view has lost its luster.[1] The present generation of scholars exhibit a marked shift of emphasis in their handling of the data of religions. The current tendency is to try to push beyond knowledge to insight. Students are encouraged to couple their mastery of basic facts with empathy, to "feel" their way into the religions. No longer is the would-be specialist's job completed by examining and describing: one must see things from inside the Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim circle of faith. One must try to catch a glimpse, a taste of what it means to a Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim to be what he is. Cataloguing, examining, describing must be climaxed by sympathetic understanding. Details of belief and practice, frequently

classified in the formal and desk-worn categories of the academic mind, must give place to patterns and organic wholes. Metaphysical conceptions, religious beliefs and rituals, ethical codes and social customs exist interdependently in a religion as parts of a total functioning entity. And they must be intimately understood as such if their impact upon the lives of adherents is to be accurately appraised and appreciated.

That "getting inside" another religion is not only desirable but possible, can be shown by citing a few practitioners of the art. One of the patron saints, so to speak, of this more penetrating kind of study is Rudolf Otto. Active especially in the 1920's and 1930's, he gained the high respect of colleagues and students in part through his incisive and authentic interpretations of the mystic stream in Hinduism. Otto's chief tool was his mastery of Sanskrit and other Indian languages. But over and above his linguistic skills Otto developed a capacity for getting inside the Hindu traditions and seeing man's religious life from a non-Christian point of view. That he successfully avoided the opposite extreme, the danger of losing or abandoning his ties with Christian faith, is amply attested by those who knew him and by books like *Mysticism East and West* and *Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace*. His critical ability to identify differences between his own faith and commitment and the alien faiths and commitments which he knew so well never withered.

Other pioneers of this approach to understanding other religions via empathetic yet critical appreciation include the Abbé Jean Dubois, who in the nineteenth century produced vivid accounts of Hindu manners, customs, and ceremonies; and C. F. Andrews, who achieved an intimate acquaintance with many forms of Hinduism in the present century. Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred C. Smith are more recent exponents of this approach in the study of Islam and Islamic

culture.[2] Huston Smith has attempted with significant success to treat all the living religions of the modern world in this manner.[3] All three have been guided by the principle that an accurate account of another religion should be acceptable to recognized authorities and adherents of that religion. The effective operation of this principle has not been noticeably impeded by their own loyalties within Christian faith.

These exponents of empathetic understanding demonstrate what is possible. Few of us will rival them in the depth of their learning or the extent of their penetration into other religions. But granted some degree of the same characteristics of mind and spirit—careful study combined with genuine human interest and personal exposure to other religions and cultures—we can hope to attain a comparable degree of authentic and accurate understanding even though we are rooted in another religious orientation.

Objective Detachment

The weakness of a strictly objective standpoint in the study of a religion may be inferred in part from what has been said. However, two basic faults in this approach require special comment. It is faulty in assuming that it is even *possible* to investigate religions (or anything else, for that matter!) from a strictly objective and neutral standpoint. And it is faulty in failing to recognize the universality of certain aspects of world religions.

It is still popular to suppose that neutrality, noncommitment, objectivity are the intelligent person's reigning life guides and the indispensable keys to knowledge and understanding *in all realms of life*. Much recent theological writing has sought to expose the shallowness and naïveté of this point of view. Fortunately, a strong tide of nontheological writing from Freud to Polanyi has also raised serious ques-

tions about the "cult of objectivity."[4] Again it should be made clear that exposing the false pretensions of the "cult of objectivity" does not encourage disparagement of scientific method or of the need for a scrupulously fair examination of data. What needs to be exposed are the notions that scientific objectivity constitutes the only valid avenue to truth and that an inquirer who has no conscious religious commitments can fruitfully investigate man's religions while a Christian or Jewish or Muslim inquirer cannot.

The blanket demand for neutrality in all things actually rests on rather shaky psychological grounds. It is a common mistake in popular circles—and also in some very learned ones—to suppose that one can live without reference to a certain outlook on life. In actuality, however, fundamental principles, ultimate commitments of some kind are operating, whether in a more or less articulate form or quite unconsciously. If we can define religion in as broad terms as a person's "intimate and ultimate concern,"[5] anyone who takes life really seriously is religious. Even the scientific investigator of religions who denies involvement with any recognized religion has his final loyalty or highest value to which he is committed most deeply. So that while he may disclaim, let us say, Christian belief and allegiance, he has another framework of assumptions and beliefs and allegiances which are finally decisive for the direction of his life. His actual alternative to Christian faith is another faith!

There is no really fundamental distinction, therefore, between the person who professes a particular religious faith and the avowedly nonreligious person. They are both committed to some frame of reference from which they understand the meaning of their experience. It may be readily granted, of course, that a supposedly nonreligious person will have an advantage over a certain type of professedly religious scholar. The manner in which one holds primary

commitments may bear heavily on the success one may expect in sympathetically understanding primary commitments which are alien. A rigid and anxious religious commitment will probably fail to attain the level of sympathetic understanding. But a religious commitment which is free from undue (self-defensive) anxiety, a religious allegiance which is born of faith and trust rather than fear can be every bit as effective as the supposedly neutral vantage point. Indeed, one who is religiously committed and who is fully aware of his own loyalties and values will be in a better position than the investigator who professes neutrality: the former will be able to guard against an unfair influence of his own commitments upon his understanding, while the latter may treat the data of religions and their claims either in a uniformly unfavorable way—as outmoded supernaturalism and superstition—or in a way that assumes there are no significant differences of truth and value among religions.

This suggests the second and final point by way of exposing illusory claims for neutrality. The consciously committed religious investigator will have an advantage over the unconsciously committed "neutral" investigator by virtue of certain universal religious phenomena. In other words, a practicing Christian has a better chance of appreciating, "feeling" his way into the *Qur'an* than the supposedly neutral observer because God is frequently portrayed in both Christian and Muslim scriptures under similar figures of judgment and grace.

This instance of common phenomena in Christianity and Islam is given a much broader base in Joachim Wach's descriptive definition of religious experience in terms of an awareness of mysterious reality which begets a total response of the worshiper. Scholars will rightly debate whether Wach's theory is applicable with complete universality to the phenomena of religions. Yet so many of man's living religions

exhibit a root experience and common types of expression that an observer who by conviction participates in one circle of faith catches glimpses of familiar landscape within the other circles. The root experience of *encountering* and being *related* to an Object of mystery and power, an Other both attractive and somehow frightening and repelling underlies the sacred writings and living witnesses of religion after religion. And this moment of religious relationship which impresses the participant as absolute and overwhelming elicits a total response of mind and will, feelings and imagination. It achieves expression through imaginative-intellectual means such as mythologies and doctrines, through cultic means such as ritual acts and liturgical celebrations in drama and dance and music and architecture, through public means such as a community of participants relating themselves to one another and to the Other which elicits their response.

To the extent that this reconstruction by Wach is accurate, it encourages the committed observer to say, "Yes, there are basic phenomena in most religions, psychological and structural elements which permit me to 'feel,' in a certain sense, at home." The same depth of response to these basic phenomena, however, is not open to the neutral observer. Nor for that matter is the self-styled objective person likely to be sensitive to the nuances of difference even within these parallels which a committed person may sense. The neutral observer will see certain phenomena that look alike, and he will note similar expressions and words and concepts. But he has not the same basis in outlook and experience as the committed person from which to identify subtle differences of attitude and tone and mood. If the religiously committed investigator fully utilizes his peculiar equipment he will show the more penetrating discernment of the meaning of religious phenomena.

The Peril of "Simplicism"

If the legitimacy of our undertaking to penetrate the interior of alien religions has been largely vindicated in the preceding paragraphs, an additional warning is necessary. We must pinpoint an adequate method of understanding religions by stating what that method is not. What we must avoid in dealing with world religions if we would do them justice is "simplicism." It is at the root of most of our difficulties in this undertaking. "Simplicism" is closely akin to superficiality in knowledge, haste in judgment. It takes numerous forms. It may appear in reactions which assume that the particular representation of another religion which we happen to meet is a full statement of that religion, while in fact no single sect or movement of a religion represents the totality of options within any historic tradition. Imagine, for example, the discomfort felt by a Baptist when a Muslim objects to Christianity because the Christianity familiar to him prescribes that the divine is mediated through an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Our Muslim, who prides himself on the *direct* and *immediate* relation of every man to the One God, may see Christianity from the outside and fail to allow for fundamental divergences within it: he mistakenly supposes that what is true for Roman Catholicism is acceptable to all Christians!

One must always refrain, therefore, from reaching judgments about another tradition *simply* on the basis of acquaintance with one representation of that tradition. The tradition is a totality, an organic whole of diverse tendencies and options; it can never be justly summed up and understood via this kind of "simplicism."

A closely related form of "simplicism" to be avoided can be stated in this way: similarities of language—identity of meaning; absence of similarities—incompatibility of meanings.

The trap of "simplicism" yawns wide when we find or fail to find sayings and reports and claims which look alike in different religions. A superficial acquaintance and a too hasty judgment are dogged by the temptation to say that there is no difference between religion "A" and religion "B," since both give much attention to the concept of love, or because both speak of the oneness of deity. The other side of this counterfeit coin is the simple inference that because Christianity exalts personal communion with God through prayer it can have little if any common ground with or sympathetic understanding for the crass and mechanical use of prayer wheels in certain forms of Buddhism.

To those who fall prey to such "simplicisms" we may point out that either they do not appreciate what students of language call a "semantic problem," or they are in the grip of the cold-war mentality. When we too easily take similarity of expression for identity of meaning, we ignore a basic problem of human communication: how do I know that you mean the same thing I mean when you use certain words and concepts? Prime examples are found in our public vocabulary and especially in slogan words or rallying cries: democracy, socialism, self-determination, freedom; and in our religious vocabulary: God, salvation, sin, hell. Used in one context, with one set of intentions, and with a certain historical and cultural background these terms will mean certain things; used in other contexts they may mean quite different things. Yet the same words are utilized.

Or the cold-war mentality will tend to leap to conclusions when quite different practices or an absence of familiar conceptions is encountered: "Whoever is not with us is against us!" This betrays a two-camp way of thinking to which we are especially susceptible today. The neutral Asian-African nations are eyed with studied suspicion by many in the West who are involved in two-camp thinking: "There can be no

third way, no mediating position between the free West and Russian Communist slavery." And all who do not declare themselves for the one and against the other are condemned by a kind of guilt by *dis*association. The discussion of the "shock of difference" has already shown how this type of thinking can operate in interreligious as well as in international affairs. To reject as incompatible and untrue practices and conceptions which on first acquaintance do not plainly conform to the familiar is "simplicism" of a very primitive variety.

One final manifestation of the demon "simplicism" may be called religious literalism. It shows itself in the supposition that the significance and meaning of religions is adequately summed up in doctrines and propositional statements. In actuality, however, religions strive to express their insights and revelations not only in straightforward language but frequently in poetry and in myths, in symbols and allegories. They do this because their Supreme Object is clothed in mystery and arrayed in blinding light. Experiences of coming into relationship with such awe-inspiring Reality compels the "reporter" of religion to speak in heavily emotional and imaginative terms rather than in plain prose. Therefore the "simplicism" of a literalistic attempt to know what religious speech and writing is trying to communicate fails to realize that rules of logic and forms of everyday speech do not do full justice to all dimensions of reality and of human experience. It was partly out of this realization, for example, that the ancient biblical community preserved poetic and mythological pictures of God as both majestic creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1) and one who strolls in his garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 2), as both wrathful judge (Amos 5) and compassionate father or husband (Exodus 32:1–18 and Hosea).

Every world religion is replete with attempts to give ex-

pression to the deepest level of human awareness. For this it resorts to emotional and imaginative and concrete means—art forms which function through the ear (poetry, story, music) and through the eye (sculpture, architecture, and painting). These means of communication point toward a richness of meaning which cannot be captured by the relatively simple language of creedal statements or of propositions for debate.

* * *

These preliminary remarks help to clear the way for a sound and serious approach to similarities and differences among religions. We shall approach the study of and encounter with world religions as committed Christians in full awareness that an honest appraisal of other religions cannot minimize the importance of objectivity; yet we shall not apologize for our own commitment but shall see it as a gateway rather than a blockade: through it we may enter with greater sensitivity and power of recognition into the religious reports of others. We shall seek to avoid the perils of "simplicism," which attempts too eagerly and too surely to acknowledge sameness or contemptible difference. We shall handle religious data with an awareness of the complexity, the organic and compound character of religious traditions; for religions are many-splendored things, living entities which have histories of their own and therefore cannot be reduced to simple homogeneity; they point toward and seek to mediate mysterious depths of reality which cannot be fully expressed by plain and logically clear language.

DIFFERENCE WITHIN SIMILARITY

This more serious approach must now be put into operation. We have said that the Christian may react from an en-

counter with other religions in terms of the "shock of similarity"—with either a grudging or a happy relativism. For better or worse the uniqueness and authority of Christ and Christian teaching are supposed to wither away in the glare of discoveries that Confucius taught an ethical ideal which looks like Christian love; that Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam teach the unity of mankind; and that Hinduism glories in the affirmation that God became man in the Lord Krishna.

A more critical inspection of these similarities and parallels discloses two sets of questions with which our approach must deal. One has to do with the understanding of exactly what is the content of each supposed parallel in the non-Christian tradition. The other pertains to our understanding of our own faith. Stated somewhat differently and more concretely, a serious and responsible appraisal of Confucius' teaching about love is involved with three tasks: to discern what Confucius meant when he spoke of "love"; to discern the real extent of parallel or similarity with Jesus' teaching; and to decide what is the outcome of the first two tasks for our understanding of our own faith.

Confucius' Teaching on "Love"

What did Confucius mean when he admonished his students to love one another? Many attempts have been made to translate the Chinese term *jen* (pronounced very nearly like *run*): mutuality, reciprocity, humanheartedness, man-to-manness, love. The symbol for the term pictures "man" and "two," suggesting the fundamental relatedness of persons. *Jen* was for Confucius the central ethical ideal which must distinguish the *Chün-tzu*, or man of perfected moral character. Its centrality in Confucian teaching is reflected in the tradition that Confucianism is a one-word religion—that is, it is epitomized in the single term, *jen*.

Substantially the same teaching of "love" is stated in the so-called Golden and Silver Rules of Confucian teaching.

Now, the content of these teachings must be discerned, and the degree of similarity to Jesus' teachings must be judged by a consideration of their respective contexts or settings and of their motives or intentions. Confucius' teachings about "love" are set within a larger body of convictions and teachings which inevitably color these particular terms. Humanheartedness and mutuality were to be infused with such attitudes as a sense of duty, a sense of propriety, reverence for parents and elders ("filial piety"), and deference to older brothers and friends. The official Confucianism of later generations tended to emphasize the formal and outward aspect of mutuality (that is, the ritual and customary patterns of propriety in human relationships—something akin to our popular notion of etiquette); and this has sometimes encouraged Western interpreters to play down similarities with New Testament teachings at this point. It is clear from the most authentic sayings of Confucius, however, that the inward elements of mutuality, the attitudes of sincerity and honesty and sense of unconditional duty forbid any easy dismissal of the parallel. There is a genuineness of concern in fulfilling with propriety the five great relationships between subject and prince, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger sibling, friend and friend.

The motive of Confucian reciprocity or "love" appears to be complex. Three basic motives are discernible in Confucius' sayings about the ideal person, the *Chün-tzu*. They are the motives of social utility, the fundamental naturalness of moral character, and the cosmic framework of moral order.

Confucius was not above a kind of utilitarian motive. A model son and heir of classic Chinese culture, he sought through his teaching to stay the moral and social and political disintegration of his own time (sixth-fifth centuries B.C.).

All men should strive to perfect their moral character, become men of *jen, in order that* social and political order might be recovered.

This utilitarianism was in turn blended with a drive for moral perfection as an end in itself. Man's essential goodness was axiomatic for Confucius; what could be more natural—and enjoyable—than so to perfect this moral goodness that one lived in harmony with himself and in all human relationships?

Yet a third motive is found in Confucius' apparent conviction that man's natural moral goodness and perfectibility had its counterpart in the universe around and beyond man. His references to the *Tao* or Way of things, to *Ming* or Providence (destiny), and to the Will of Heaven suggest that the superior man would be motivated by a consciousness that moral superiority was in the scheme of things. A cosmic moral framework formed the widest context of man's existence. Therefore, when the superior man sensed where his duty lay, he did it not for profit but for duty's sake—because duty and right were grounded in "Heaven."

The Degree of Parallel with Jesus' Teaching

The outlines of general similarity begin to fade when Confucius' ethical principle of "love" (together with its context and motives) is placed alongside Jesus' teaching. The content of "love" in the New Testament is more explicitly sacrificial in character, the context is that of a more dynamic and personal theism, and the motive is singular.

In both his teaching and his living Jesus' "love" was radically sacrificial. Confucius sought to instill in his pupils what Max Weber has called a "calculated helpfulness," but Jesus' understanding of love goes beyond calculation. The love of which Jesus and Confucius speak is by no means wholly dissimilar or opposed: Confucius' stress on the need

for genuineness and sincerity at least brings his conception near to one aspect of that which Jesus portrays. But the context of formal relationships within which love was to operate and the element of calculative discrimination or wisdom (*chih*), which was to inform the practice of love in Confucian life, weaken measurably the argument for similarity. Jesus' statement of the Golden Rule and his basically Jewish outlook show that he did not demand self-deprecation or self-abuse in acts of love toward others. In this he is akin to Confucius; yet the unconditioned, unformalized, and unregulated outgoingness of love in Jesus' teachings puts him far from Confucius. It would be difficult indeed to imagine Confucius taking the part of the father in the Prodigal Son parable. The way in which New Testament love overreaches and confounds a strict rule of fairness would have been repugnant to Confucius.

Further differences emerge from a consideration of context and motive for Jesus' teaching and life. Love in the Gospels and throughout the New Testament has a "prophetic" character. Its content and essential character as well as its motive are determined by a context of personal relationship with a dynamic and active God. Jesus' hearers are called to love one another as a result and extension of their love for God, who is like a father—strict and just, yet gracious and forgiving. It follows from loving God without reservation—the "first and great commandment"—that one will fulfill the "second commandment which is like it": love the neighbor as one loves oneself. Furthermore, the motive is similarly grounded in God's prior activity: "love one another even as God has loved you." No calculation, no "in order that," no utility. I truly love my neighbor in an outgoing and sacrificial way when I am laid hold upon by an awareness of the unbounded love which God enacts for me. The singular and overriding motive of Christian love is gratitude.[6] No at-

tempt is made to regulate the degree and type of love by proximity of relationship—that is, son to father or friend to friend. Jesus' conception of the love that is normative for life in God's kingdom seems utterly to deny any consideration of familial relationship: father and mother are not to come between a man and his commitment to the coming of God's kingdom.

Equally alien to Confucius' outlook is the Christian's love of the enemy and persecutor. Where Jesus counsels, "Love your enemies; return good for evil," Confucius would act with strict justice: "Repay kindness with kindness; but repay evil with justice."[7]

Clearly, the outlines of general similarity between Confucius' and Jesus' teachings on love in human relationships are crisscrossed with particular differences in content, context, and motive.

Similarities and the Christian's Faith

There is still a third task which must be met. A serious approach to understanding similarities between Confucius' and Jesus' teachings will take care to establish what Confucius really meant when he spoke of "love"; and it will try to discern the actual degree of similarity to Jesus' teaching by probing the context and motive as well as the content of both teachings. Its third task is to assess the implications of what has been discovered up to this point. If there are real similarities, how do these bear upon our understanding of our own faith? It boils down to this: what is the nature of the authority of Jesus in the mind and heart of the Christian?

In spite of the differences which seem to lie within the similarities between Confucius' and Jesus' teachings about love, recognition of the differences does not dissolve the similarities.[8] In terms of ethical sensitivity and ethical formu-

lation Jesus and Confucius stand remarkably close to one another. And in the degree that this is so it raises the question of how we understand Jesus' unique place in our faith and life; that is, to the extent that Jesus and Confucius occupy common ethical ground the Christian must ask whether a faith that is directed first and foremost toward Jesus as ethical teacher is well grounded. To put it crassly, is Jesus' "claim to fame," his prestige and authority for our faith based upon the uniqueness of his teachings on how men should relate themselves to one another? If this is the only or the primary ground of our faith, we may still experience something of the "shock of similarity."

Indeed, Confucius is not the only great moral sage whose wisdom competes in significant measure with New Testament ethics. Within ancient Chinese culture alone there were two teachers whose views on love were in some respects even closer than those of Confucius to the spirit of Jesus. Lao-tzu, who may have been an historical person a few years older than Confucius, is credited by tradition with the composition of the central scripture of Taoism, called the *Tao-Teh-Ching* (pronounced dow-day-jing). In this short "Classic Concerning the Way and Its Power," notorious for its many widely variant translations, a mystical philosophy and a nonviolent and nonaggressive ethic are sketched. Where Confucius counseled his students to return justice for evil, we read in the *Tao-Teh-Ching* that whoever would live according to the Pattern (*Tao*, Way) of the universe and partake of its power (*Teh*, Virtue, Moral Excellence) must return good for evil.

> To the good I act with goodness;
> To the bad I also act with goodness.
> Thus goodness is attained. (Chapter 49)
> . . .

Return love for great hatred. (Chapter 69)
Being loving, one can be brave;
. . .
Instead of [that is, without] love, one has only bravery;
. . . he who fights with love will win the battle;
He who defends with love will be secure.
Heaven will save him, and protect him with love. (Chapter 67)[9]

Here are admonitions which come very close to Jesus' teaching of ". . . resist not evil . . . love your enemies" (Matthew 5:39 and 44; compare Romans 12:21). A teaching about human relationships which Christians often assume to be peculiar to Jesus and the New Testament—to some it is the very pinnacle of his sublime ethic—resembles closely things said several centuries earlier in a Chinese setting.

Another teacher of ancient China, Mo-tzu, led a later movement which competed with Confucianism on political, philosophical, moral, and religious bases. This revolutionary figure stood closer to Jesus than to Confucius in seeking to do away with the latter's formalism: love is not to be graded according to the kind of relationship (that is, love toward parents should not be of a different and higher quality than love toward a friend or stranger); love should be universal, without distinctions of quality or degree.

Moreover, Mo-tzu exhibits a much more dynamic and concrete conception of God or Heaven as the ultimate source and sanction of love than either Confucius or Lao-tzu. In this he is closer to the New Testament conception of love. Love, says Mo-tzu, is the "will of Heaven" (a phrase which also plays a role in Confucius' teachings), the will of God and the will of the spirits of deceased ancestors. Mo-tzu knew this, it seems, by rational deduction: love and righteousness must be derived from Heaven since all else that benefits man derives from Heaven. God loves men without discrimination,

wills that they love one another with an all-embracing love, punishes the lack of love among men.[10]

Time and space do not permit us to go further here in exploring these additional and often more pointed cases of similarity with Jesus' teaching. To be satisfied with the mere recording of these striking parallels would be to expose ourselves to the very weakness we have condemned. Serious study requires that questions of content, motivation, and context of Lao-tzu's and Mo-tzu's teaching be examined to discern the extent of similarity and the possibility of difference within similarity. A fully valid understanding cannot be secured at less expense in time and thought.

Nevertheless, what can and must be emphasized is that even when similarities are qualified by difference within similarity a genuine challenge is posed for the Christian who understands his religion in essentially moral terms. Whatever the balance in a given case between similarity and difference within similarity, anyone whose Christian self-understanding depends heavily on uniqueness of ethical teaching can expect to be sorely pressed by familiarity with non-Christian religions.

In other words, the serious study which overcomes superficial reactions to the "shock of similarity" does not thereby immunize us from the need of re-evaluating the character of our religious commitment. Rather, it forces us to ask whether a religious faith which is summed up as "Christian ethics" is rightly placed and truly grounded. It should drive us back to the base line questions of any serious attempt to understand Christian faith: what is "the gospel," the good news of which the New Testament speaks and from which Christians presumably draw content, motivation, and context of their faith? Is Jesus' message and mission mainly a body of ethical exhortation? Or is it something more of which this is one

part? Is Jesus' significance comprehended in the familiar liberal Protestant picture of him as an ethical teacher? Or is there something to the New Testament community's persistent and variously expressed claim that Jesus was of such exalted significance that he must be spoken of with figures of speech like "Son of God," "Lord," and "Christ" (Anointed One, Messiah)? Did this community's faith and life root deeper and reach higher than moral awareness alone can account for?

Incarnation in Hinduism

Thus far predominantly ethical similarities between classical New Testament sources of Christian faith and classical Chinese materials have been at the center of attention. Other instances of parallels to Christian teachings—such as the stress on human brotherhood in Islam and Buddhism—must be passed over virtually unmentioned, although they merit equally serious study in terms of the character of similarity and of difference within similarity. Quite another type of difference within similarity requires serious study also as an antidote to confusion. This is predominantly theological rather than ethical. It has to do primarily with affirmations concerning the nature and character of the divine rather than with the ordering of the human.[11]

The theological similarity to be examined is the Hindu belief in the *avatara* (divine descent). We are dealing here with another kind of challenge to Christian faith. Many liberal Christians blanch at any affirmation of the "divinity of Jesus Christ"; and they are peculiarly open to the challenge of moral teachings in other religions which seem to parallel Jesus' teaching. Those Christians, however, who stand closer to historic Christian affirmations about the theological significance and status of Jesus Christ are open to the challenge of

the Hindu doctrine of *avatara*. For the classic Christian confession that in Jesus Christ the seemingly preposterous has happened—that God has taken on flesh and dwelt among us "full of grace and truth"—is also claimed in some sense in Hinduism. We must at least make a start toward serious study of this claim before concluding the present chapter.

The *Bhagavadgita* is not only the most beloved single unit of scripture among devout Hindus; it is also readily available to Westerners in modern and highly readable translations. In this "Song of the Lord," as it is called, we meet with a portrayal of Krishna as the divine descent—*avatara*—of the Supreme Lord, Ishvara.[12] Appearing in human guise ("incarnation") as a charioteer, Krishna proceeds to instruct a young prince, Arjuna, in the things that make for his salvation. He makes it clear that man's surest way to salvation lies in complete surrender in loving trust and devotion to him, the Lord Krishna.

To countless Christians who have read the *Gita* the parallel with the New Testament portrayal of Christ as God-become-man is immediately suggested. In one section of the *Gita* Krishna doffs his human form and reveals his divine identity directly and fully to Arjuna—recalling the classic Christian claim that God most fully reveals himself in the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

The Limits of Similarity

What are we to make of this general similarity? How profound is it, and how genuine is its challenge to Christians who maintain that God has uniquely and fully revealed himself to man—"once-for-all," in the New Testament's phrase—in the Messiah of God, Jesus of Nazareth? Does the term "incarnation" mean the same in Hindu usage as it does in formulations of Christian faith?

More thorough investigation throws considerable light on these questions in terms of the content and context of the Hindu conception. The general similarity with the Christian conception cannot be gainsaid. The figure of Krishna in the *Gita* represents a focal point for one of the most fruitful areas of exploration in Hinduism and Christianity: the appeal to divine grace. Throughout the Old Testament God's gracious favor is a wellspring of faith and insight and strength to loyal Israelites. The New Testament community continues to draw from it in making its central assertion of God's loving care for his people—God shows his love to the point of entering the world of men through the historical person of Jesus (incarnation) and suffering death on a cross (crucifixion) in behalf of all men. And Paul writes movingly of divine grace in terms of his new life "in Christ," that is, through complete faith in and self-entrustment to God in Christ.

The *Gita* also asserts a divine grace and concern for mankind. The angels' chorus in the familiar King James Version of the Bible—"Peace on earth, good will toward men"—seems to be restated in the *Gita* where Krishna explains his mission: whenever truth and righteousness, justice and order are worsted or radically threatened by men, Ishvara comes into the world to put things right. We seem to meet here in Hindu dress a kind of messianic breaking into history by its gracious Lord and Judge by means of "incarnation."

It is just here, however, that serious scrutiny of the Hindu conception begins to uncover particular differences in the midst of general similarity; for Hindu teaching holds that Krishna is only one—if the most illustrious—of a series of ten *avataras*. The *Puranas*, a vast body of pious Hindu folk-literature, abounds in tales of Krishna and the other major *avataras*. They range all the way from a dwarf and a tortoise

to the founder of Buddhism. But as with the conventional numbering of Hindu gods at three or thirty-three or 333,000,000, the ten major *avataras* are only a beginning. The fully developed doctrine holds that "incarnations" of deity are, like the gods of popular Hinduism, innumerable. Excellence in any sphere of life is considered an *avatara*—great artists, poets, philosophers, saints qualify. Gandhi is widely thought of by Hindus as an *avatara*. Gandhi's own statement on "incarnation" admirably exemplifies the Hindu view in which "incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service to mankind."[13] Gandhi sees nothing amiss in homage paid by future generations to one who has been extraordinarily religious, for such homage does not detract from God's greatness, nor is truth violated, he feels.

It is difficult to imagine a view more diametrically opposed to historic Christian affirmations. At no point is the Christian tendency to exclusivism stronger than here. The belief that redemption is possible for all men in Christ alone has been a driving force in 2,000 years of Christian missions. Whatever we may think of this tendency, its implications and consequences, it is securely grounded in the biblical beginnings of the Church. The New Testament's exclusive concern with Jesus Christ as the sole instrument of God's saving act is expressed succinctly in the telling phrases "at the right time" and "once for all." ". . . when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, . . . to redeem those who were under the law" (Galatians 4:4). ". . . [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

The question of a proper understanding of these roots of Christian exclusivism in the light of other aspects of biblical faith must be deferred to the final chapter. What is essential at this point is that the Hindu understanding of "incarna-

tion" cannot be simply equated with the New Testament understanding of that concept. Weighty differences begin to appear within the general similarity.

Two other points of difference come readily into view upon further examination of Hindu sources: the questionable moral character of Krishna in some sources, and the mythological nature of some *avataras*. Whatever one may think of Krishna's counsel to Arjuna on caste duties,[14] the portrayal of this divine descent in the *Gita* is in most respects worthy of human attempts to picture the divine. (See especially Chapters 10, 11 and 18.) In the *Purana* sources, however, the same figure is the celebrated hero of many a bawdy exploit among country milkmaids. Krishna is there presented as a kind of rustic Don Juan in pursuit of herdsmen's daughters! It must be acknowledged, however, that the folk traditions of the *Puranas* are not technically accorded the stature and authority in Hinduism that is granted to the *Gita*. Therefore, it is difficult to tell how far the all too earthy pictures of Krishna in Puranic sources should be pressed in comparisons with the New Testament pictures of Christ.

Finally, not all acknowledged *avataras* are as clearly historical personalities as Gandhi and the Buddha. The animal "incarnations" clearly do not qualify in the sense that historical existence implies conscious personal will and reason. Rama, the "incarnation" of all gentlemanly virtues, is a mythological and composite ideal figure; and Krishna himself has no clear human lineage. Even when the evidence suggests that Krishna may have been a preacher of righteousness in an age long past, this is given no great significance in Hinduism. The historical element in claims about divine involvement with man has little or no importance. Krishna is regarded as equally valuable to Hindus whether he ever lived a life of flesh and blood or not.

All these points so briefly mentioned make it quite im-

possible to speak glibly of similarity between Christian and Hindu affirmations about divine involvement in the human scene. Hinduism speaks broadly of "incarnations" in the plural, and Christianity proclaims a single and "once-for-all" unveiling of God in Jesus Christ. Hinduism is content to speak of "incarnations" in animal forms and to some extent to associate its leading *avatara* with highly questionable moral character, but Christianity has never imagined God becoming incarnate in less than human flesh or being represented among men by less than the highest moral character. Hinduism puts little store by historical authenticity of its *avataras:* although God's graciousness and concern toward mankind is movingly portrayed in the *Gita* and elsewhere, the divine assumes and removes various physical forms like a garment without becoming essentially involved in the human quandary and in time and history. Christians affirm that God becomes fully man in Jesus Christ, a Jew of first-century Palestine who knows fully the depths of human suffering—even unto death: if the story of Jesus' physical and historical reality could be demonstrated to be no more than pious fiction, Christian faith would suffer a mortal wound.

These differences and similarities of content are but the specifics of a broader similarity and difference of context. The context of the Hindu conception of divine incarnation is a view of God and the world which is usually termed either *pan-theism* or *pan-entheism.* For Hinduism generally the divine is immanent or resident in, if not identical with, all things and beings in the universe. Yet God is independent of all things in sense and in time and cannot be touched by misery or suffering or death. "Incarnation," therefore, occurs with comparative ease as simply a higher concentration of the divine reality at any particular point; and although some strands of Hindu tradition speak of a purposeful descent of the divine in order to safeguard *dharma*—right, law, truth—this

is done without any great cost to God: being eternal and changeless, God is beyond suffering. "Incarnation" occurs in this context rather automatically like a law of cause and effect, when conditions are right.

A notable similarity in context for the Hindu and Christian conceptions of incarnation appears at this point. The New Testament conviction that the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ took place "when the time had fully come" suggests the "right conditions" of the Hindu conception. Yet profound difference lies within this similarity of context: in so far as the Hindu conception of divine descents is akin to an automatic cause-effect process, it cannot be assimilated to the biblical conception. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Father of Jesus Christ exhibits personal will, initiative, action: incarnation can occur at the right time only as a consequence of God's active and decisive will. Furthermore, incarnation can only represent a most momentous divine decision: far from being expected, it is a "stumbling block" for most men from Jesus' day to ours, and it can be received by believers only in awe and wonder verging on disbelief: the biblical portrait represents God the Creator as radically distinct from his creation. God's "transcendence," his qualitative "otherness" in distinction from the created world, prohibits a conception of divine immanence which speaks of God as resident in or being identical with the universe of things and beings. Paradoxically, however, the God of Christian faith is pictured throughout the Bible as so deeply concerned with men and history that incarnation is not inconsistent with the divine purpose; indeed, the God of the Bible is so deeply and actively concerned with his world that the incarnation climaxes the immemorial suffering of God himself in behalf of a wayward and self-willed humanity. The New Testament community of faith asserted dramatically that the very depths of the divine com-

passion and concern with human destiny was revealed in the death of his "only begotten Son" at the hands of men.

* * *

Our discussion of some initial results of serious study of similarities between religions and of difference within similarity must come to a close. However, the discussion is far from complete. Serious and more thorough study must go on indefinitely, probing further issues that have been opened up here and dealing with others that have not been mentioned. (For instance, the question of how one can become fully sensitive to peculiar and complex meanings of the mythology and symbolism of other religions has not been touched. Success in this endeavor calls for direct exposure to persons and cultures whose religious life is illumined and nourished by these highly imaginative forms of expression and communication. The most promising conditions under which this exposure can occur for most Westerners are described in Chapter 8.) Moreover, although the differences cited should give some assurance that similarities between Christianity and non-Christian religions need not occasion shock, similarities are real. To understand the implications of these partial similarities and the differences that accompany them should be the concern of intelligent and committed persons. What is the significance of these and other similarities and differences for the problems of Christianity's relationship to other religions? As we become more thoroughly and accurately acquainted with the other religions and their points of similarity and difference vis-à-vis Christian faith we must also be asking how these factors relate to the problems of interreligious relations and rivalries in our time. In other words, we must move incessantly from understanding what *is* to discerning what *ought to be*. What weight should we give to the similarities and to the differences as we try to decide how

Christians and the Christian church ought to relate themselves to world religions?

What we are saying in effect, then, is what we said at the beginning of this book: a sound solution to the problems of rivalry among world religions will emerge as a result of a well-grounded understanding of other religions and of a far-reaching examination of our Christian faith. Christians today —as in each new era of history—are faced with a task of theological reconstruction. In a world which is characterized by the interpenetration of cultures and the aggressive self-consciousness of the major faiths of mankind the need for theological relevance is acute. We must discover on the one hand the authentic center of authority for our Christian faith and life. If this center is Jesus Christ and the Bible, we must still answer for our own time the further questions, How is Jesus Christ rightly understood, and How is the Bible rightly interpreted? On the other hand, we must discover our actual and our proper attitudes toward the world in which we live, with special reference to its non-Christian communities of religious faith and practice.

These matters will not be pursued in any set sequence—the first questions settled and then the second ones attacked. Relevant theological reconstruction always occurs with one eye on the authentic center of authority in religious life and faith, and the other on the world. Both tasks are pursued simultaneously or alternately. Each contributes to the other. And so we must approach the problems of interreligious rivalry from the point of view of an accurate understanding of the authentic center of our faith; but we must also discover that center in full awareness of the developments and realities of the world in which we live. Among these realities are the elements of similarity and of difference within similarity between Christianity and other world religions.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. As a discipline which began in the eighteenth century, *Religionsgeschichte* cannot be adequately characterized in these few words. Already in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, men like Wundt, Lévy-Bruhl, Soederblom, and William James began to emphasize psychological penetration and understanding of the phenomena of religions and of religious behavior.

2. See Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); and *Sandals at the Mosque: Christian Presence Amid Islam*, "Christian Presence Series" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

3. H. Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

4. A perceptive glance at theological writing in this connection is afforded by Chapter II of Roger Hazelton's *New Accents in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961). See also the editor's preface and the pertinent articles in *The Christian Scholar*, XLII 1, 1959. Michael Polanyi's contribution is most systematically set forth in *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1958).

5. This view of religion in terms of fundamental attitudes is central to the work of men like the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich and the sociologist-historian of religion Joachim Wach. By itself it is open to the criticism of being too all-inclusive; yet it penetrates more deeply to the roots of religious life and thought than most other thumbnail definitions which are available.

6. This contrast should not be taken as a denial that gratitude plays a role among other motives in Confucian teaching. The ideal of "filial piety" toward parents, elders, ancestors involves gratitude for benefits received. It seems fair to say that Jesus and Confucius would have understood and accepted what each

might say about the manward side of gratitude—about the experience of constraint upon the will which gratitude exercises; but they would have found it difficult indeed to agree upon the proper object, the specific role, and the implications of gratitude for life.

7. Chapter XIV in either Soothill's translation, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), or James Ware's translation, *The Sayings of Confucius* (New York: The New American Library, 1955).

8. Recent and more detailed comparisons of Jesus with founders of other world religions include C. S. Braden, *Jesus Compared* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957); and H. H. Rowley, *Prophecy and Religion in Ancient China* (London: University of London Press, 1956), compares Hebrew prophets with Chinese sages.

9. These passages can be compared in different translations. Comprehensive but bulky is a collection of scripture selections from many religions edited by R. O. Ballou and F. Spiegelberg, *The Bible of the World* (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1939). A more recent and convenient translation of the *Tao-Teh-Ching* is R. B. Blakney's *The Way of Life: Lao Tzu* (New York: The New American Library, 1957).

10. Mo-tzu's writings are not so easily accessible as Confucian and Taoist classics. A brief but reliable outline of his thought may be found in Fung Yu-Lan's *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 49–59.

11. To be sure, the separation of theological from ethical considerations is often a tenuous one. This is especially so within the biblical framework. The theological passes into the ethical with less of a break than shifting from first to second gear: concern with God leads directly to concern with human relations, and man's relation to man is fashioned after man's relation to God. Nevertheless, it is sometimes helpful for purposes of analysis to separate these two aspects of religious awareness.

12. Ishvara is identified in Hindu mythology with Vishnu, whose

millions of devotees are often referred to as a major "sect" of popular Hinduism called Vaishnavism. The god Vishnu together with the gods Brahma and Shiva constitute a kind of Hindu "trinity" (*trimurti*). This triadic godhead is commonly called Brahman. Unlike the members of the *trimurti* and other gods, however, Brahman has no female consort (that is, mythological representation of a god's creative energy); for Brahman transcends the concept of gender and is the supreme source of all being.

13. See N. K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1948), pp. 230f; see a similar statement by Radhakrishnan in his translation of the *Gita*, pp. 31f: *The Bhagavadgita* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948).

14. Western readers of the *Gita* are frequently offended by Krishna's insistence that Arjuna engage in fratricide with a clear conscience. Gandhi and many modern Hindus have overcome this offense by allegorizing the *Gita:* its deeper and genuine truth is that every true Hindu is an Arjuna who fights manfully and rightly against evil and ignorance and injustice within himself. But even a straightforward reading of the poem is understandable in the light of certain metaphysical conceptions and social structures in ancient Hindu culture: on the one hand, killing in defense of right is not forbidden because the essence or soul or Self of every being is eternal and indestructible; on the other hand, killing in defense of right may become necessary for those of the *Kshatriya* or warrior-ruler caste, who are charged by society with the duty of maintaining justice and order. These points are clearly stated in the first three of the *Gita*'s eighteen chapters.

ADDITIONAL READING

Especially noteworthy among one-volume surveys of world religions are: J. B. Noss, *Man's Religions,* revised edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956); E. A. Burtt, *Man Seeks the Divine* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); and H. Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

Essays by leading Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim scholars are collected in three volumes by Kenneth Morgan and published by the Ronald Press Co., New York: *The Religion of the Hindus* (1953), *The Path of the Buddha* (1956), *Islam—the Straight Path* (1958).

All these books include extensive bibliographies for more detailed study.

A full presentation of Joachim Wach's definition of religion is found in his *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), Part I; and in greater detail in *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

5. Antidote for Confusion (II)

Similarity Within Difference

In Chapter 3 some of the symptoms of confusion which result from the "shock of difference" were noted. These superficial and hasty impressions of the seemingly barbaric and sub-Christian features of other religions imperil the encounter of Christians with non-Christian religions. They provide an incomplete and false picture of the world's religions, thereby frustrating from the start any possibility of meeting constructively and intelligently the challenge of these religions in the twentieth century.

What is needed is critical inquiry into the aspects of non-Christian religions which induce this "shock of difference" in the Christian observer. We must ask of the differences as we have already asked of the similarities: What is the content and intent of the offending practice or belief, and what is the larger setting of practices and beliefs in which it is found? We must strive to discern how the strange belief or the repulsive practice seeks to express the meaning of being a Buddhist or Hindu or whatever. And our study must be infused with a genuine desire for sympathetic understanding, for seeing Buddhist rituals or Hindu beliefs through the alien eyes of Buddhist or Hindu. Otherwise we convict ourselves of con-

demning what we have not tried to understand, and this is quite as unworthy as blindly accepting what we have not critically examined.

Once again we must be content at this point with less than a full exposition of what is involved in serious study of differences between religions. Enough can be said within brief compass, however, to indicate that hasty and superficial reactions to differences are just as premature and misleading as they are with respect to similarities. Here too there is an antidote for confusion: awareness of similarity within difference.

This should not suggest, of course, that an awareness of similarity within difference dissolves the element of difference. The demon of simplicism has the exasperating capacity for attacking at the flank when repulsed at the center. Or, to continue the original metaphor, an antidote is not a cure: it is only a stopgap measure. An antidote is administered to block the destructive action of a poisonous agent; additional measures are needed to bring the patient to full health. The same procedure holds here. First, the poison of confused and extreme reactions to differences must be neutralized. Then other measures must follow if the Christian's encounter with world religions is to be healthy and potentially fruitful.

What some of these other measures are will be the burden of following chapters. The present task is to demonstrate the operation of similarity within difference in three instances of the "shock of difference."

The first case in point is the seeming utter contrast between Christian love of God and neighbor—a deeply personal, outgoing, sacrificial concern—and Buddhist statements about casting off all personal attachments and relationships, love as well as hate. The painful oversimplification of this view is exposed by two important and related considerations which emerge from a careful scrutiny of Buddhism.

Buddha's Head and Buddha's Heart

As soon as one steps beyond a little familiarity with Buddhism, it becomes evident that the earliest formulations of Buddhist teaching do not easily harmonize with the traditions about the Buddha's life and career. The "shock of difference" is justified to the extent that very negative attitudes toward human relationships are expressed in certain Buddhist scriptures. One is not wholly unjustified in the impression that the Buddhist ideal involves its devotees in a detached and loveless life which is at best self-centered in the extreme, at worst immoral in its aloofness from personal relationships.

The example of the Buddha himself which is preserved in story and sacred tradition, however, seems to deny such teaching. If Buddhism can rightly be called a religion of infinite compassion, it is primarily because of the traditional picture of the personality and career of the Enlightened One. Upon achieving enlightenment into the very secrets of existence Gautama Buddha spurned what was believed to be his due—final release (*Nirvana* in Sanskrit, *Nibbana* in Pali) from the sorrows and suffering of active life in the world. Instead he gave himself in tireless service to suffering humanity, seeking to pass on the "Noble Truths" about how to escape life's suffering. The earliest or Southern type of Buddhism (usually called *Hinayana*—"small vessel of salvation"—or *Theravada*—"way of the elders") has maintained that this supreme act of renunciation, of self-sacrificing concern for others is not primary in the Buddha's outlook. The later or Northern type (*Mahayana*—"large vessel of salvation") makes the Buddha's example of unbounded compassion for all living beings an integral part of the Buddha's outlook. The personal warmth in love of fellow men which Christians sometimes fail to find in some early Buddhist teachings pervades and

motivates the religious life in most *Mahayana* Buddhist schools. As one writer has phrased it, the Mahayanists follow the Buddha's heart, as it continues to throb in the traditional portrait of the Enlightened One; while the Hinayanists follow the Buddha's head, as reflected in early teachings ascribed to him.

The Problem of Translation

Further light is shed on the similarity within difference between Christian and Buddhist teachings about love by an awareness of the vagaries of translating Buddhist scriptures. Modern literature frequently suffers from translation into a foreign language. Greater is the probability of missing the nuances and spirit of literature when it is translated from a language of the ancient Orient. An excellent illustration of this source of confusion is the very word that concerns us, *love*. At some points in his preaching the Buddha spoke very disparagingly of the love relationship between persons. "Those who love nothing in the world are full of joy and free from pain." And from the *Dhammapada:* "Let . . . not man love anything . . . From love comes grief, from love comes fear; he who is free from love knows neither grief nor fear" (Chapter 16).

At another point, however, as set forth in what is called the "Discourse on Universal Love" (*Metta Sutta,* in Pali, the common language of Buddha's time), Buddha counsels the virtue of very positive love toward others:

> As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects and loves her child, her only child, so let a man cultivate love without measure toward all living beings. Let him cultivate love without measure toward the whole world. . . . This state of mind is the best in the world.[1]

Or again, from the *Dhammapada* (Chapter 17), "Let a man overcome anger by love (gentleness, calmness). . . ."

Now how can both these counsels be accepted and practiced by the Buddhist? The Master seems clearly to have contradicted himself. The clue to this apparent contradiction is discovered on closer inspection. It lies less in the Buddha than in the translation of his sayings. In the negative sayings "love" means rather *liking* or *desiring* or *craving*; it is "love" as dependence and attachment to the beloved. It is expressed in the Pali texts by *piya* and *kama*. In contrast to this the positive statements refer to "love" as a *universal good will* and *compassion, gentleness, calmness*, a feeling and attitude of identification with all living and suffering beings. This is commonly expressed by terms like *metta* and *akkodha*.[2]

It is the latter type of love which shines forth from the traditional picture of Gautama the Buddha that was mentioned above; it provides one of the two great Buddhist communities, the *Mahayana*, with the substance of their reigning ideal: the *Bodhisattva*. The *Bodhisattva* is one who has committed himself to the path of the Buddha, to the way which leads eventually to Buddhahood or Enlightenment. As the ideal *Mahayana* Buddhist he follows the Buddha himself, the great pathfinder, in renouncing the blessedness of *Nirvana*—final release from birth and death, pain and suffering, ignorance and desire. Entry into this eternal state is postponed indefinitely in order that the *Bodhisattva* may pursue a selfless ministry of infinite compassion to all living (and therefore suffering) beings.

* * *

These two considerations are a very limited sampling of the illumination that may be gained by careful consideration of ancient religious traditions. The issue of differences between religions is complicated by the translations of key terms and concepts and by failure to acknowledge the many-sidedness of a religion. The difference between Buddhist and Christian

understandings and evaluations of love masks important similarities. Serious study gets behind the superficial mask of irreconcilable difference to find that the Buddha's antipathy toward "love" concerns an attitude deeply involved in self-concern and inordinate demands upon life, craving for what life is unable to give. It finds that another type of "love," selfless and benevolent, is essential in both types of Buddhism and pre-eminent in the Mahayanist ideal. What may be regarded on first acquaintance as an unbridgeable gulf between Buddhist and Christian evaluations of love may actually hold within it the stones of a very sturdy bridge. Recognition of this similarity within difference permits and encourages an honest and possibly creative encounter of Christians with Buddhism. It should be recognized with equal clarity, however, that acceptance of similarity within difference must not be an open door to "simplicism." Its proper effect is that it enables Christians and Buddhists to avoid initial confusion *and to explore further the degree of both differences and similarities.* This exploration—impossible within the limits of the present discussion—would involve study of the Christian and Buddhist understandings of love in terms already applied to the Christian-Confucian parallel: content, context, and motive.

A-moral and World-Denying Tendencies in Hinduism

We may turn to Hinduism for two additional instances of the "shock of difference" which require closer scrutiny. These are the differences between Christianity and Hinduism in their conceptions of the status of morality and in their conceptions of the created order of the world. In classic Christian faith the Bible speaks of a Creator God who makes a good world and who by his inherent nature makes decisive ethical demands upon man, but Hindu sources sometimes speak in

tones which suggest world- and life-negation and of the dispensability of moral distinctions.[3]

Serious study justifies in some degree the judgment that Hinduism and Christian faith are indeed incompatible on these fundamental questions. In so far as the *Upanishads* and the six philosophical schools of classic Hinduism represent the highest expression of Hindu faith and belief, the "shock of difference" is not without foundation. What is truly and ultimately real, these sources say repeatedly, is "spiritual" or "mental" only. Actually, these terms are at best clumsy approximations. Therefore the *Upanishads* (and also the *Gita*) characteristically resort to the more mysterious and symbolic names of *Atman-Brahman, Om, Self.* The ancient poet-seers of the *Upanishads* struggled ceaselessly to designate the ground of all being and the final goal of the wise man:

> It is—Om.
> This syllable is Brahman. This syllable is indeed supreme. . . .
> The Self, whose symbol is Om, is the omniscient Lord. . . .
> He through whom man sees, tastes, smells, hears, feels, enjoys, is the omniscient Lord. He, verily, is the immortal Self.
> Knowing him, one knows all things. . . .
> Soundless, formless, intangible, undying, tasteless, odorless, without beginning, without end, eternal, immutable, beyond nature, is the Self. Knowing him as such, one is freed from death.[4]

In the final analysis these peculiar terms too are judged to be inadequate. The Sanskrit formula *neti, neti* recurs throughout the *Upanishads:* "The Self is described as *not this, not that.* It is incomprehensible, for it cannot be comprehended. . . ."[5]

Now if the ultimate reality, the source and ground of all that exists is unknowable, it would surely be foolish to ascribe to it a will to create the universe. To be sure, the universe may be said to be in some sense a creation of Self or *Brahman.*

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, for example, speaks of Self or "the great Lord" as "the Mayin (maker)" and of "Prakriti" (nature) as "Maya (art)."[6] And in a recent paperback translation of the same *Upanishad* "the creator of all" is pictured in more elaborate mythological terms:

> Maya is thy divine consort—
> Wedded to thee.
> . . .
> Thou, spirit in flesh, forgetting what thou art,
> Unitest with Maya—
> But only for a season.
> . . .
> With Maya uniting, thou hast brought forth the universe.
> . . .
> The universe is thy Maya.[7]

The master philosophers of Hindu tradition assumed the appalling task of deriving a systematic formulation of saving wisdom from the vast and varied Upanishadic musings. Something of the character of their task is reflected in the fact that out of a welter of philosophic efforts no less than six schools or "ways of seeing" (*darshanas*) have been recognized as standard. One of these schools especially, *Vedanta* (a strict monistic idealism), gave considerable attention to the role and meaning of *maya*. The great formulator of strict *Vedanta*, Shankara (A.D. eighth century), was not pleased to associate *Brahman* with creating the universe in any usual sense, since what creates cannot be ultimately real. The only thing that can be said about its involvement in creating the world is that *Brahman* does not will or desire to create, for that would imply incompleteness, imperfection, change. The empirical universe is like a play staged by *Brahman* as a by-product of *Brahman's* "sport" (*lila*). It is a kind of imaginative projection or illusion accomplished by *Brahman's* magic and creative power, which is *maya*.

One may also get the impression that Hindu scriptures demote or ignore or devitalize moral effort. The wise man (functional counterpart to "the man of faith" in the Christian point of view) seems to be beyond all moral demands. As an earlier writer on Hinduism and Christian ways of salvation saw it, Hinduism lacks a vibrant demand for personal moral transformation.[8] The pattern of man's redemption as portrayed in the *Upanishads* is said to involve no renewal or change, but merely an intuitive recognition or knowing that only Self is eternally real. The Hindu sage is one to whom moral distinctions do not apply. When once he has acknowledged *Brahman* and his own essential identity with it, "Then a father is not a father, a mother not a mother, the worlds not worlds, the gods not gods, the Vedas [ancient scriptures] not the Vedas. Then a thief is not a thief, a murderer not a murderer. . . . He is not followed by evil, for he has then overcome all the sorrows of the heart."[9] Or the devotee of Krishna may receive divine succor despite an absence of moral uprightness. All wrongdoing is outweighed by a combination of knowledge of *Brahman* with loving devotion to Krishna:

> And though you were the foulest of sinners,
> This knowledge alone would carry you
> Like a raft, over all your sin.[10]

In so far as these references to morality represent stable features of some of the main lines of Hinduism they—like statements about the created order as *maya*—may be traced back to a conception of ultimate reality. As *Brahman* does not will or desire to create, so *Brahman* is beyond good and evil. *Brahman* neither makes moral demands nor recognizes a fundamental and categorical difference between good and evil, for *Brahman* "exists" in a realm in which all essential distinctions are meaningless: before the Absolute all dis-

tinctions are merely relative. It is "Beyond right and wrong, beyond cause and effect, beyond past, present and future."[11]

Moral Rigor and World-Affirmation in Hinduism

Serious study indicates that these conceptions are deeply rooted and widespread in Hinduism. In so far as they accurately represent higher Hinduism it is at least clear that philosophical tension with Christianity must go on. Without the surrender of basic principles on one side or the other any expectation of an easy coexistence or even synthesis of the two traditions is out of the question.

Careful examination, however, uncovers more than we sometimes want to see. Living religions, if closely observed, seldom fail to frustrate our longing for simplicity and consistency. And none of the living religions is more obstreperous in this regard than "Mother Hinduism," in whose ample bosom nearly every known religious conception and experience finds acceptance. (It is highly relevant to point out, however, that this same flexibility is present in less extreme form even in Christianity, where an other-worldly and ascetic monasticism has had a long history!) Hinduism may never produce a purely Hindu version of the prophet Amos with a sharp awareness that ethical standards and the course of human history are rooted in the very mind and heart and will of the Creator God. (Although some might contend that Ramakrishna or Gandhi came close to being such a prophet.) Yet in both its classic and modern forms Hinduism has shown itself marvelously adaptable to needs for affirmative attitudes and actions in the world and for the rigorous observance of moral distinctions. It is as though the serious inquirer were an explorer in a new and fantastic land: whatever he gazes upon intently is mysteriously transformed into its opposite. Here, for example, is Hinduism's thrust toward world- and life-negation which derives from the doctrine of

Supreme Reality as eternally distinct from the visible and sensible world; but—lo and behold—it tends to double back upon itself, to produce consequences which on first glance it seemed to preclude! Since *Brahman* is source and undergirding power of all that is, the way is open to develop a conviction of the sanctity of all living beings as the basis for moral action. Curious, yet true: the ascetic and hermitlike world- and life-denial of the *Upanishads* and much Hindu philosophy has its counterweight in the cherishing of each being as a manifestation of *Brahman*. Ten centuries ago Shankara could assert that ethical attitudes and activity find their surest foundation in the conception of that single Supreme Reality, *Brahman*, which is the Self in and behind every individual self. And a modern reformulator of *Vedanta* for the West, Swami Nikhilananda, urges that the common translation of the Hindu term *maya* as "illusion" or "unreality" is misleading. The created world of *maya* is only temporarily and secondarily real, but it is not sheer illusion. It is only distantly and indirectly a partial manifestation of the Supreme Reality, but as a product of *Brahman* it cannot be altogether unreal.[12]

Nor are the things and values and goals of life in the created world to be either ignored as totally *unreal* or denied as *evil*. The problem with life in the world is one of attitude. If one is ignorant of the distinction between Reality itself and the temporary, limited, and inferior stuff of natural existence which veils and obscures it (*maya*), then evil comes into being as a matter of mistaken identity. As Hindus are sometimes shrewd to point out, this downgrading of the immediate and worldly is strikingly similar to the prophetic and Christian exhortations to put the love of God and his Kingdom before all things. (See, for example, Matthew 6:19–33.) Christian preachers inveigh against materialistic values and

secularism in a way that corresponds closely to Hindu priorities.[13]

Furthermore, this represents no recent development of a changing Hinduism. From before the age of the early *Upanishads* (about 500 B.C. and after) forces were at work in opposition to life-negation and withdrawal from the world. The Vedic hymns (roughly 1500–500 B.C.) exhibit a conception of the gods as champions of Right, Truth, and Law (*rita, dharma*). This was gradually supplemented by another conception which developed into a very powerful moral sanction as *karma*, the universal law of cause and effect. According to the automatic working of *karma*, every deed begets its like: you get what you give, reap what you sow. Thanks largely to the ethical emphasis of Gautama Buddha (sixth century B.C.), moral distinctions became crucial in forging the chains of one's destiny; good *karma*, generated by good deeds and thoughts and words, lift one into higher station in a future incarnation: bad choices produce bad *karma*, lower one's next rebirth, and so perpetuate further the relentless cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. At least as far as this aspect of Hinduism is concerned, moral distinctions are crucial determiners of human destiny.[14]

Hinduism acknowledges and implements a positive evaluation of the world and of moral standards in many other ways. The teaching of withdrawal from the world in mystic contemplation is repeatedly stated as presupposing moral discipline and achievement.

> By learning, a man cannot know [the Self] *if he desist not from evil, if he control not his senses*, if he quiet not his mind and practice not meditation. . . .
> He who has discrimination, whose mind is steady and whose *heart is pure*, reaches the goal, and . . . is born no more.
> Let therefore the wise aspirant, knowing Brahman to be the

> supreme goal, *so shape his life and his conduct* that he may attain to him. . . .
> Devotees seek to know him by study, by sacrifice, *by continence, by austerity*, by detachment.[15] [My italics]

And as the world-denying outlook was gaining systematic expression in Upanishadic thought several centuries B.C., influential circles of Hindus sought to buttress the this-worldly aspects of Hindu culture. The *Code of Manu* states that actual withdrawal from life in society should be reserved for one's later years: the ideal Hindu life of the *Four Ashramas* or stages should begin with moral training as well as education in ascetic disciplines; the second stage should be given to full participation in social responsibilities and personal pleasures: one should raise a family, acquire wealth and enjoy all the natural privileges and pleasures of which human beings are capable within the restrictions of one's caste; only in the third and fourth *ashramas* was the Hindu expected actually to affect his withdrawal from life in the world.

Add to these features the popular Hindu veneration of Rama and Sita, legendary paragons of personal moral virtue extolled in the *Ramayana Epic;* recall Gandhi's emphasis on the age-old moral principles of truth speaking and non-injury (a kind of Hindu version of Schweitzer's "reverence for life"), and one begins to appreciate the importance of moral considerations within Hinduism. This may betray to the rationalist the weakness of internal contradiction and paradox in any religion. It represents nonetheless a living reality, an organic entity with a life-history in which many tendencies at different times have risen to dominance and few have been discarded altogether. Hindus themselves have managed to live with such internal inconsistencies for twenty-five centuries; on this ground alone Hinduism deserves respect and

understanding in its own right. Moreover, those who proclaim Hinduism to be the true universal faith do so in large measure on this same ground: its internal diversity offers something for every type of temperament!

* * *

These all too fragmentary gleanings from a more careful exploration of Hinduism reveal a rich and complex set of pictures rather than a single and totally alien picture. They show that a better-equipped expedition can penetrate beyond the coastline into the various areas of the hinterland and can bring to light fuller information about a strange religion. If some features of the land are utterly new, incompatible with what is familiar "back home," the continent as a whole is not without the familiar and identifiable features of mountains and plains, rivers and lakes. The striking conceptions of the created world as *maya* and of the Supreme Reality as essentially transmoral are seriously at odds with Hebrew-Christian conceptions of God and the world; yet other aspects of living Hinduism bring it into speaking range of this-worldly and ethical concerns of Christianity. Careful study informs us that the "shock of difference" and the superficial judgment of other religions as irreconcilable with Christian teachings are precipitous and less than honest. Serious analysis tells us that our appreciation of parallels in other world religions is a sound and reliable basis for relationship only when it is qualified by appreciation of the significant differences which cluster about and inhere in these very parallels. By the same token, a frank awareness of seemingly irreconcilable conflicts in basic conceptions among the religions needs to be balanced by a readiness to acknowledge the presence—however paradoxical—of common concerns and conceptions which qualify and moderate (but do not eliminate) the differences. This means that we must reject simple similarity and simple differ-

ence as the pattern by which we shall map out our relationship to non-Christian religions as living wholes. Both similarities and differences must be weighed and evaluated and interpreted in the light of the whole organisms with which we have to deal. Only then can we hope that we are prepared to encounter the world's religions in fruitful and productive ways.

We must turn in the remaining chapters to the normative aspect of our task. With a firm basis in the intensive exploration of world religions, we must go on to formulate an answer to the crucial question, How should we as Christians make use of the results of serious study as we relate ourselves to other world religions? What *ought* to be the shape of our stance and the tone of our attitude as we confront ever more frequently and closely non-Christians of other cultures? Institutions of business, education, and government set up broad directives of policy which guide their operations in dealing with their various problems and prospects. The Christian community must do likewise with respect to its relations with other religions. It must formulate a policy of interreligious relationships.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Kenneth Morgan, *The Path of the Buddha* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956), p. 94.

2. These various English terms are drawn from translations by Max Mueller, S. Radhakrishnan, K. J. Saunders, and W. D. C. Wagiswara. E. A. Burtt has also noted the difficulty of understanding Buddhist teachings on love: *Man Seeks the Divine* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

3. Albert Schweitzer is prominent among Westerners who have interpreted Hinduism as fundamentally world- and life-negating: *The Development of Indian Thought* (New York: Henry Holt

and Co., Inc., 1936). Radhakrishnan has attempted in many of his writings to counteract this interpretation—most directly in his *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Chapter III.

4. In speaking of Self the Hindu sages did not refer to the self or personality or ego of common parlance. The sense of individual or ego identity is seen by much of Oriental salvation-philosophy (Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist) not as something to be cherished and fulfilled but as something to be submerged or escaped. The same *Katha Upanishad* says that ". . . the knowers of *Brahman* . . . see a difference between . . . the individual self and the Universal Self . . . as between sunshine and shadow": *The Upanishads*, Swami Prabhavananda and F. Manchester, transls. (New York: The New American Library, 1957), pp. 18–20. Vedanta Society of Southern California, copyright owner.

5. From the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *ibid.*, p. 89.

6. The *Hindu Scriptures* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1948), p. 216.

7. *The Upanishads*, pp. 124ff.

8. Sidney Cave, *Redemption, Hindu and Christian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1919).

9. *The Hindu Scriptures*, p. 93.

10. *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita*, Swami Prabhavananda and C. Isherwood, transls. (New York: The New American Library, 1944), p. 55.

11. *Katha Upanishad* in *The Upanishads*, p. 18.

12. Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*, "World Perspectives, Vol. XVII" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), Chapter II.

13. See again Nikhilananda (Note 12) for a defense of Vedantic Hinduism as refusing to see ethics as an end in itself or as the way to man's highest destiny: *op. cit.*, Chapter IV. Some of his points strike a chord not unfamiliar to biblical and Protestant emphases on the subordination of ethical achievement to a relation to God through decision and faith.

14. Allusions to *karma* and descriptions of its operation may be found in the *Katha* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads* and in the *Gita*.

15. *The Upanishads*, Swami Prabhavananda and F. Manchester, transls. (New York: The New American Library, 1957), pp. 19 and 110. Vedanta Society of Southern California, copyright owner.

ADDITIONAL READING

Useful collections of excerpts from Buddhist scriptures include: C. H. Hamilton, *Buddhism—A Religion of Infinite Compassion* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952); E. A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York: The New American Library, 1955); E. Conze, *et al.*, *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954).

An authentic and compact exposition of the main schools of Hindu philosophy is M. Hiriyana, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932).

6. The Counsels of Experts (I)

Liberal Voices in East and West

It is a common device of modern life to appeal to the expert. When the instruments of problem solving which are available to us as amateurs bog down, the cry goes up, "Call in an expert!" This tactic is not in itself misguided. It has a royal ancestry that reaches at least as far back as the Greek philosopher Plato, who sought to enthrone philosophers—"experts" in all things!—as rulers.

Unfortunately, this nearly unbounded faith in the experts is not wholly vindicated by the facts of their performance. The dilemma of having to formulate a policy on interreligious relationships is a case in point. Generally speaking, the experts who have devoted their abilities to the problems of rival claims to religious truth and value have not risen altogether above the two alternatives described earlier as the "shock of similarity" and the "shock of difference." They move on a much more sophisticated level and they exhibit both fuller knowledge and greater awareness of the complexity of their subject; but by and large they stand either in the camp of a liberal and tolerant view which verges on overemphasis on similarities, or in the camp of an exclusive

and intolerant view of non-Christian religions which stresses differences too much.

For this reason our search for a policy cannot be fulfilled by an appeal to the experts alone. Furthermore, since there are many experts, there is no single counsel upon which we can call with complete confidence. Yet we cannot ignore the experts for either reason. It would be sheer folly to turn a deaf ear to men who have given much thought to world religions and to questions of their interrelationship. It would be just as futile and self-defeating to declare that because medical doctors or physicists sometimes arrive at divergent interpretations of symptoms or natural phenomena we should henceforth ignore the counsels of doctors and physicists.

Rather, we shall consult the experts and seek to profit from their labors. In this as in other fields progress requires that we proceed along the lines of the dentist and the builder: make full use of what is already at hand, cutting away what is unsound and erecting the new structure on what is solid.

Voices in the East: Gandhi

Asian spokesmen characteristically advocate a very liberal and tolerant policy for the encounter between religions. This is fairly represented in the Hindu view of interreligious affairs as voiced by Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. These two men more than any others combine pre-eminence in the world of Hindu religion and life with wide recognition and acclaim from the West. The role of Mohandas K. Gandhi as the principal leader and symbol of Indian efforts for national independence established him as a saint among his own people and as a political strategist and hero of the oppressed throughout the world. He worked tirelessly from the early 1930's until his assassination in 1948 to achieve without physical violence the political and spiritual liberation of his people from domination by an alien power

and by alien ways of life. And in the course of his work he came into intimate contact with non-Hindus. Out of these contacts he formulated an essentially Hindu view of relations among religions. Ironically, "Gandhiji" died at the hand of a Hindu fanatic enraged by Gandhi's calls for brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims.

As Gandhi stands as a popular symbol for many Westerners of what is good and readily comprehensible in Hinduism, Radhakrishnan has shown himself to be the outstanding interpreter to the West of classical Hindu philosophy and of refined modern Hindu belief and practice. The one-time professor of Oriental Religions at Oxford has sought through many books and public addresses to make Indian ways understandable in Western terms. As if to exemplify his insistence that the Indian mind is not bound to advocate sheer withdrawal from the world, Radhakrishnan has served as Vice-President of his country since its independence in 1947.

Gandhi and Radhakrishnan voice the classic and perennial Hindu position of tolerance which is rooted in the assumption that all religions are ultimately one.[1] Gandhi tells in his autobiography of childhood experiences which planted deep the seeds of his later development. As a nurse for his Hindu father (a local political official) he frequently was present when Muslims, Jains and Sikhs were received and listened to with tolerance and respect; as a schoolboy he remembered with horror the Christian missionaries' abuse of Hindu beliefs and practices and the stories of how the life of a Christian convert was torn apart by his removal from Hindu ways.

Gandhi's contacts with Christians during his early career as a lawyer in South Africa strengthened his reluctance to be converted. Even the best-intentioned Christian friends for whom he developed respect and affection had no appreciation for Hinduism but sought to save young Gandhi from an abyss of ignorance and superstition. One friend's insistence

that Gandhi remove and discard a necklace which his mother had given him brought forth a response that foreshadowed Gandhi's later attitude on conversion from one religion to another.

> . . . "I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it. But I cannot, without sufficient reason, give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love and in the conviction that it would be conducive to my welfare." . . . Mr. Coates could not appreciate my argument, as he had no regard for my religion. He was looking forward to delivering me from the abyss of ignorance. He wanted to convince me that no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity which represented the truth. . . .[2]

As late as the middle period of his life Gandhi confessed that he did not know the Hinduism into which he had been born. He was seeking after truth by studying Christianity and Islam as well as Hinduism. But his Hindu background—however inarticulate it was for Gandhi—effectively restrained him from accepting the Christian claims. It was impossible for him to accept Christianity as "a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions" because it denies that non-human beings have souls; it also claims too much for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross: to Gandhi this sacrifice is not mysterious and miraculous but an example for all men—which Hindus approximate more nearly than Christians.[3]

Gandhi's attitude is rooted in central Hindu concepts and convictions as well as in experiences. God is Truth itself, which is equivalent to Being (*sat* in Sanskrit) or the very source and spring of all things existent. Where there is Truth there must also be pure knowledge or consciousness (*chit*); and the presence of pure Truth and pure Knowledge must also involve pure Bliss (*ananda*). God can be spoken of by

the traditional Hindu formula, *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. God is Truth: Eternal Being, Perfect Knowledge, Pure Bliss.

On the basis of this understanding of God religion must be utterly selfless devotion to God as Truth, whatever the consequences. It is a life of experimenting with and seeking after Truth—*Satyagraha*, in the classic Hindu phrase. If this prescription sounds authoritarian and rigid its genius is believed by Hindus to lie in its flexibility. We know that God is One only; yet we also know that he is Truth and that he makes himself known in various ways. "Hence there is nothing wrong in everyone following Truth according to one's lights."[4]

Gandhi was not pleased to be called an apostle of tolerance. He used the word, but only as he filled it with his own meaning. His interpretation of tolerance in the religious life offers further insight into his views on how religions are and ought to be related to one another.

> . . . *ahimsa* [non-injury, active good will] teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. . . . Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium. . . . Everyone is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everyone is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the North Pole is from the South. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.[5]

In effect, then, Gandhi exhibited in his view of religious relationships that paradoxical combination of contrary ele-

ments which is so characteristic of Hinduism as a whole. Gandhi was involved in a kind of agnosticism, and uncertainty about his knowledge of Truth; and this agnosticism affected and cultivated his approach to interreligious relations in terms of *ahimsa*. That is, for Gandhi, as for Upanishadic Hinduism, Truth is anything but unreal; yet by a kind of immediate or proximate agnosticism, there is no assurance that Gandhi's or any other religion shelters a genuine clue to Truth. Truth *is*, but we have no irrefragable certainty as to *what* Truth is: for all we know, *all* religions may be wrong. Therefore, Gandhi's view that men should foster a positive respect for other religions according to the principle of *ahimsa* is nourished in the negative soil of this immediate agnosticism. And while the "cultivation of tolerance for other faiths [may indeed] impart to us a truer understanding of our own," it does not seem to promise a sure understanding of Truth itself.

Voices in the East: Radhakrishnan

It is in Radhakrishnan that we meet the master of "bridgemanship" in East-West relations. No other man in our or any previous century has been more active in high academic and governmental service in both East and West. He has brought to and through this remarkable experience a universalism of thought and vision and an immensity of historical knowledge and philosophical skill which demand attention.

Radhakrishnan's point of departure is rooted in the same soil of classic Hindu assumptions and conceptions as Gandhi's. As an interpreter of Hindu thought and experience he has stood within the predominant stream of Hindu philosophy called monistic *Vedanta*. This orientation is akin to what Western tradition knows as absolute idealism. It posits a single spiritual or ideal reality as the ultimate source

of all existence. This Reality is unquestionably one; in our highest conception of It, It is impersonal; It alone is fully and genuinely real; and, finally, It is ineffable, unknowable. This Hindu spokesman, too, embraces that type of agnosticism which insists that Reality or Truth *is*, yet which acknowledges man's inability to know Its nature.

Radhakrishnan has spoken and written and lived a conception of religion as in essence a thing of the spirit.

> The need of the world today is for a religion of the spirit, which will give a purpose to life, which will not demand any evasion or ambiguity, which will reconcile the ideal and the real, the poetry and the prose of life, which will speak to the profound realities of our nature and satisfy the whole of our being, our critical intelligence and our active desire.[6]

Furthermore, this genuine religion of the spirit is universal: all religions are at their true center one. There is a "transcendent unity underlying the empirical diversity of religions . . . , common ground [which] has its source in the nonhistorical, eternal." Historical studies demonstrate "the universality of fundamental ideas. . . . We all seek the same goal under different banners."[7]

It is from this starting point—religion as the universal and highest reflection of spiritual reality—that Radhakrishnan has led a campaign during the past generation, carrying the banner: "A reborn living faith in spiritual values is the deepest need of our lives."[8] He seeks to win a skeptical and disillusioned and materialistic mankind to spiritual rebirth by rejecting openly all "fossilized tradition" and "dogmatic supernaturalism," by affirming a "reverence for truth . . . [which is] dearer than Buddha or Jesus" and which is meaningful to all who are indifferent to conventional religion and supernaturalism or disenchanted with atheism and nihilism.[9]

Religion, for Radhakrishnan, is in essence awareness of and response to spiritual reality. This ultimate reality of Spirit may be called "God"; but it is also the irreducible and living element called "soul" which animates all beings.

> In our normal experience events happen which imply the existence of a spiritual world. The fact of prayer and meditation, the impulse to seek and appeal to a power beyond our normal self, the moving sense of revelation which the sudden impact of beauty brings, the way in which decisive contacts with certain individuals bring meaning and coherence into our scattered lives, suggest that we are essentially spiritual. To know oneself is to know all we can know and all we need to know. . . . Spirituality is the core of religion and its inward essence. . . .[10]

This high and positive valuation of "true religion" (singular) has not prevented Radhakrishnan from expressing sharply critical estimates of religions. The worship of God in spirit and in truth, the bringing of souls into their rightful harmony with God must labor under the burden of man's religions. These are temporal and finite and relative constructions of men; they are designed as instruments for the expression of *genuine* religion. However, they readily become its intolerant captors. Radhakrishnan singles out this aspect of separatism in religion for vigorous attack.

> While the economic and political forces are bringing people closer together, religions are doing their utmost to maintain the inner barriers that divide and antagonise peoples. . . . Men are attacked for affirming what men are attacked for denying. Religious piety seems to destroy all moral sanity and sensitive humanism. . . . We have developed a kind of patriotism about religion, with a code and a flag, and a hostile attitude towards other men's codes and creeds. The free spirits who have the courage to repudiate the doctrine of chosen races

> and special prophets and plead for a free exercise of thought about God are treated as outcasts. . . . The World would be a much more religious place if all the religions were removed from it.[11]

The future of true religion requires that the separatism of religions be overcome. A promising future for religion consists in

> a free fellowship of faiths, where by contact and exchange each faith will acquire a new spirit and a new life. The keynote of the new attitude is expressed by the word 'sharing.' The different religious men of the East and the West are to share their visions and insights, hopes and fears, plans and purposes. Unhappily, just as in the political region, so here also this is more an aspiration than an actuality. . . . [Religions, despite their negative and mutually intolerant features] are all engaged in the common effort to build a higher and more stable life. They are fellow-workers toward the same goal. It is our duty to shake hands with their followers today and attack the forces of selfishness and stupidity, injustice and irreligion.[12]

Radhakrishnan has frequently contended that what the world needs is a more widespread seeking of what some have called the "*sanatana dharma*," eternal religion. The hope of the future lies in the world-wide realization of that religion of the spirit which at once transcends and underlies all religions. It is not desirable that men should promote any single religious tradition as the basis of man's spiritual unification. The "spiritual facts" and the "moral universalism" which all religions hold in common need only to be recognized and nurtured. "Each of the great religions . . . has more or less the same religious ideas"—if not originally, then by importation from other religions: "faith in God and love of man," philosophical depth, spiritual intensity, vigor of thought, human sympathy, holiness, purity, chastity, charity.[13]

The Appeal of Asian Universalism

Here is the gist of the views of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan on religion and the relations among religions. They would agree with Japanese Buddhists, who say, "All paths lead to the top of Mt. Fuji." All religions are simply various routes to the same goal, like many paths to a single summit. This summit can be mystically experienced and affirmed; but in Itself It remains hidden, wrapped in a cloud of unknowing. The differences among religions are to be expected in view of the varieties of human temperament and capacities, geographical and cultural divergences. There is no real problem of relations among religions except in the ignorance which blinds men to the ultimate unity of all religions and impels them to make special and intolerant claims for their own limited tradition.

The position of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan will have considerable appeal in the West—especially among the so-called "unchurched" and the extreme liberal arm of Protestantism. There are several plausible reasons for this. For one thing the appeal of Gandhi the man is great: a saint and to many Hindus a special manifestation of the divine, his purity of life and nobility of motive have made a deep impression on Westerners who know very little in detail about him. His method or technique of relating religious insight and conviction to problems of social justice has caught the imagination of important segments of American society: witness the movement to desegregate public facilities in the South by nonviolent "Gandhian" means. By the force of his person and vision Gandhi will have a hearing among many who confront seriously the problem of religious rivalry.

Another reason why the Hindu point of view will be echoed in the West is that our liberalism has made much of tolerance and relativism. There are also deep strains of prag-

matism and naturalism in American thought and life: the insistence on striving actively to meet immediate human needs and to realize human ideals by the most effective means available. John Dewey gave forceful expression to the conviction (still widespread and deeply rooted in the American mind) that theologies and doctrines and creeds are expendable—and the sooner the better! Dewey was convinced that a common faith could be practiced by all men of good will and intelligence without reference to particular and exclusive historical traditions and organizations. It is likely that many who would recoil from Dewey's radical proposal to discard the limiting institutional factors of historic religions would welcome the view of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan as a breath of fresh air. With the Hindu view you can have your cake and eat it too: complete tolerance and inclusiveness is promoted *through* all religious traditions and communities.

Voices in the West: Hocking and Toynbee

Asians repeatedly take the West to task for its schizoid philosophic outlook: we in the West separate God and man, God and the world, man and nature, the knowing person and the known object; while the East stresses underlying and ultimate unity of God and man, God and the world, man and nature, knower and known. This philosophic divergence is nicely symbolized in the fact that a clearly predominant view of interreligious relations characterizes Asia, while deeply divided views characterize the West.

Different Western spokesmen champion very liberal and very conservative views of our problem. To represent the very liberal view an American philosopher, W. E. Hocking, and a British historian, Arnold Toynbee, have been chosen. Both are eminent men of learning in their respective fields of philosophy and history, and both have spoken out boldly

and pointedly on the issue under discussion.[14] Because of their many fundamental similarities we shall draw from the writings of both Toynbee and Hocking to represent a liberal Western position.

Perhaps the strongest strands of unity that run through the thought of these men are two basic considerations. The first concerns the emergence of a world culture and world civilization and its corollary of a "world faith." The second is that all religions are at their deepest level, in essence, one.

The Emergence of World Culture

Hocking and Toynbee make their case for the emergence in our century of a world community in greater detail than is done in Chapter 2 of this book. This process, they contend, is furthered by certain features of man's natural equipment: there is a human impulse, a seemingly inherent drive toward and need for philosophical and moral unity. Being primarily men of the mind, Hocking and Toynbee believe deeply that ideas and the spiritual and moral elements in man's make-up play a decisive role in his outward history: according to this view, the patterns of political and economic and social life of human societies must eventually be brought into line with these less tangible but extremely powerful realities of the spirit.[15]

The process by which a world community is struggling to be born is seen by these experts as neither totally good nor totally bad. The womb from which a full and genuine, co-operative and peaceful world community may emerge carries both blessing and curse. The beginnings of world community which are attributable to technology and "annihilation of distance" are fraught with danger for human welfare and human destiny. The full and fruitful world community which we seek is only potential, a possibility which is threatened by the destructive forces of revolution, chaos, and inhumanity.

Toynbee identifies these inimical forces as a kind of many-headed monster called "man-worship": the worship of human power as such has many faces—communism, Nazism, "technocracy," and the movements for nationalistic emancipation and the achievement of secular (godless) happiness.[16]

Hocking sees the threat to world unity in much the same terms. He refuses, however, to brand secularism unqualifiedly as an enemy; while secular movements have sought to free certain areas of life from religious control, this has *aided* Christianity in establishing its independence of the Western culture with which it had become too closely identified.[17] It is "scientism," with its denial of purpose in the physical world, that is the nerve center of forces that are hostile to genuine world community. He views with alarm the deeper sources of instability in the present world scene such as the "new self-consciousness." This takes the form of several points of view or frameworks of thinking and believing which pervade the modern world: the cults of objectivity, relativism, and "psychologism" (that is, various types of subjectivism). *The Coming World Civilization* will be slowed, halted, or tragically perverted as long as these attitudes of commitment to noncommitment are in the ascendancy.[18]

Hocking and Toynbee are convinced that in the modern maelstrom religion and religions must play a key role in combating some of these forces and in redirecting or reconsecrating others. Their call for a united front of the world's religions harmonizes with voices that are increasingly heard in Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Islam. It is grounded in an understanding of religion's universal aspect of concern with an absolute and unqualified goal to which individuals devote themselves with "passion"; in Hocking's words, religion is essentially a self-conscious concern which is sanctioned by a cosmic demand. It is the "passion for righteousness" understood as a universal obligation of man.[19] Or again, it is that

universal human attempt to push beyond "sole-selfhood" into fullness of being.[20]

The Essential Unity of All Religions

At this point we begin to see the second fundamental consideration of the liberal Western viewpoint in operation: religion wherever it is found is essentially a universal attitude or a set of attitudes toward man, God, and the world.[21] The ways and means of encouraging and furthering movement toward the unity of mankind lie pre-eminently in the world's great religions: they possess "common elements" or "essences" or "essentials." What is required is that we capitalize upon or exploit these essential features of the higher religions in their own interest and in the interest of human welfare. Toynbee identifies these common elements primarily in terms of attitudes toward man, evil, and suffering: man is dogged by the problem of "original sin" as pride and self-centeredness; man is not the highest spiritual reality, but is one of the non-self-explaining phenomena of life; man seeks to establish constructive and harmonious relationship with a spiritual "presence" or suprahuman reality by conquering the "original sin" of self-centeredness; man's knowledge is a means to action, not an end in itself; suffering occupies a central place in the life of man and in the human response to reality; man consistently prefers good over evil.[22]

Hocking's list of common elements or essences of the great world religions is somewhat more subtle and abstract. The "unlosable essences," in which lies the full and essential truth of religion, include a sense of obligation or duty; a recognition that the ultimate source of existence is good; an awareness that some deepest and most significant aspect of the human person endures; an affirmation in some form of the "communicability of deity," that is, of the human or incarnational aspect of the divine being; finally, an ever-flowing stream of

mysticism and suprarationalism which has as its corollary the paradox that renunciation is the precondition of insight, losing one's life is necessary to saving it.[23]

With these unifying elements already in being we need not contemplate the tremendous task of building a world faith from the ground up. Our aim should not be to create a new universal religion, a kind of religious esperanto which will meet the spiritual needs of every language of faith. As Hocking puts it, a nascent universal religion is already in existence. Furthermore, an artificial hothouse religion would have no deep-going roots, no body, no corporate expression or institutional frame; a fully universal faith will have to utilize one of the present religions, an already "going concern," if it is to have sufficient strength.

If we object that in taking some single religious tradition as the base of a world faith we are stuck with the narrowness and particularity of that tradition, Hocking and Toynbee give a "yes and no" reply. Hocking answers "yes" in stressing the necessity of particularity: the universal religion cannot be simply religion in general; it must be a religion; its pertinence to life requires it to be particular as well as universal.[24] And Toynbee speaks of "convictions" as necessary to spiritual power in religion: they cannot be given up. Each tradition can retain its own convictions while uniting on the common basis of "the spirit of a religion," the fundamental attitudes that unite all religions.[25] These men also answer "no" in stressing the inherently universal character of religions. Toynbee says that the universal religion of the future shall carry its convictions with humility and charity, without arrogance and exclusivism and fanaticism. And both insist that any religion that aspires to this high role must undergo a fundamental process of rediscovering and living by its universal essence.

How would Hocking and Toynbee promote the realization

of this coming world faith? They vigorously reject exclusivism or in Hocking's phrase, the "Way of Radical Displacement" as the principle of religious interaction in the modern world. Toynbee condemns it because it exalts precisely what religions the world over struggle against: self-centeredness. It is a manifestation of that original sin of pride and selfishness which, strange as it may seem, has been condemned by Christian theology and fostered by Christian missions. Jewish-Christian intolerance and exclusive claims to truth are the arch-foes of the movement toward greater understanding and unity among religions. The Way of Radical Displacement is bad for the fundamental reason that it denies the common elements or essences which Hocking and Toynbee believe are present in all religions.

The traditional Christian claim to superiority and to sole trusteeship of truth is also contrary to the contemporary mood as well as being impractical. The aim of conversion when it is coupled with claims to superiority and finality has been almost sterile in Christian efforts to evangelize the world. Not only is the percentage of converts in Asian populations pitifully small; the attempt to displace pagan faiths root and branch arouses dangerous hostility and provokes interreligious and intercultural animosity. And whenever this spiritual imperialism is moderately successful its success is won at the price of great personal and cultural distress: converts are uprooted, shorn of a rich cultural heritage, deprived of the sources of psychological and moral stability.

Thus, practical as well as theoretical considerations render this more aggressive policy unsatisfactory to the liberal point of view. More congenial to this perspective is what Hocking has called the "Way of Synthesis." This comes close to a kind of supermarket approach to interreligious affairs, which enjoys increasing support in the West. According to this "eclectic" or "syncretistic" view, men of intelligence and

good will should be able to construct a viable religious faith by choosing something from here and something from there.

Neither expert is happy with this solution, however. For one thing, it tends too easily to relapse into indifference and sheer relativism, which says that all religions are equally good and that since a man's own religion is best for him, there is no real possibility of attaining *universal truth.* The slackening of morale and the lowering of religious vitality which accompany a thoroughgoing relativism are far from the real needs of the modern world. This eclectic kind of synthesis, this syncretism of religions is also rejected by Hocking as "fragmented": it ignores the organic unity of every higher religion, in which each part is bound in interdependence with the whole.[26]

Syncretism is condemned by Toynbee as artificial, exploitative, and just plain unsuccessful: it has never held up as a stable investment on the world market of religion.[27] Yet Toynbee is convinced that a more genuine synthesis in religions *must* occur in the future—indeed, it is already in process. A durable synthesis will not be consciously engineered on a utilitarian principle; it will occur by a twofold process: that religion whose vision of God is fullest and which offers the greatest means of grace or blessedness will replace other religions (winning their devotees voluntarily) and absorb the best of its rivals. The negative part of this process cannot be overlooked, however. Religions must walk the *via purgativa:* all nonessentials must be sloughed off or purged in order that essential truths of religions may assume their full and rightful status. Beliefs, teachings, and practices must be tested, says Toynbee, by whether or not they lead the believer to closer contact and harmony with the Absolute Reality. By this process the essentials enumerated earlier are established, and nonessentials are seen to include myth, theology, and the institutional aspects of religion: all these elements are encum-

brances and hindrances, evidence of man's basic weakness and self-centeredness and craving for security. Their secondary and nonessential character should be recognized.

Hocking's most positive proposal is described as the "Way of Reconception."[28] By this approach the interests of each religion in its own health and vitality and relevance as well as the interests of world community are best served. What is required is that each religious tradition engage in a process of reconception of its own essence, its own motivating principle(s). This is accomplished by a process of induction or discovery: one can find the essence of one's religion by laying hold of reasons why a particular group of facts or experiences belong together. This calls for a very large measure of humility, a sense of incompleteness, and even "consociation" of a religion with others. "Without losing grip on the firm identity of [one's] . . . own way, each can grow in his understanding of that way through the added experience of worship with another in whom the reality of religion is perceived."[29] The development in self-understanding and the common recognition of the "reality of religion" (the essences) by various religions results in a faith which is capable of infinite depth. This faith will be characterized by (a) maturity: it will possess the ability to adopt a positive valuation of science and the natural realm without giving up a conception of the supernatural; and by (b) an inspired radicalism: it will exhibit an inspired radicalism which will stand for and fight for the right of the responsible individual against the state; and it will embrace an "auspicious fanaticism" (exemplified in Albert Schweitzer) by which the "will to create through suffering" displaces the "will to have a costless comfort." Both these qualities will be more and more prized in various faiths, absorbed and related to their own insights. "These processes [of absorption and integration of maturity and radicalism] will therefore promote the silent *rapproche-*

ment of the great faiths without concealing the differences in historic rootage."[30]

Christianity and a World Faith

The views of Hocking and Toynbee have not been rightly stated if they seem to be involved in the kind of relativism which both men profess to reject, for they acknowledge that Christianity is best suited to fill the role they describe. They fully acknowledge that Christianity has by no means "arrived." It must divest itself of any marks of dependence upon Western culture and show itself able to criticize all human institutions.[31] Yet this is not an impossible assignment; its partial realization is grounded in the fact that Christianity preceded the establishment of Western civilization by some eight centuries; and it is reflected in the principle of separation of church and state as well as in the de-Christianization of Western culture in the modern period.[32] More positively expressed, Christianity's head start on the road to maturity lies in its freedom of social application and its proved capacity to come to terms with science and technology. Its social application is not bound up with an ancient cultural matrix with its own rigid and comprehensive prescriptions, as is true of Hinduism (the caste system) and Islam (the *shari'ah* or law by which Muslim life should be governed). With respect to science and technology, Christianity like no other religion has negotiated its head-on encounter with scientific theories and methods; and out of this it has emerged with a "superior power of self-expression . . . , wider resources of self-definition and of apology."[33]

Christianity, then, bids fair to serve as that particular form of religion in its purity or essence which can bind humanity together in the faith that suffering love is at the divine source of creation, in the belief that "desire must be reborn as love, a will to create through suffering," and in the actual enact-

ment of such faith and belief through creating "conditions for the nonfutility" of such a will.[34] Christianity must slough off any tendencies toward Western provincialism, exclusivism, and arrogance; it must seriously undertake to reconceive its essence in an atmosphere of mutuality toward other religious traditions.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. The most elaborate single statement of this view is by Bhagavan Das, *The Essential Unity of All Religions*, third revised edition (Benares: Ananda Publishing House, 1947).

2. *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948), pp. 49 f.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 170 f.

4. R. Duncan, *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), p. 47.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 50 f.

6. A. N. Marlow, ed., *Radhakrishnan: An Anthology* (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1952), pp. 126 f.

7. *East and West* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 127. See also Radhakrishnan's *The Recovery of Faith*, "World Perspectives, Vol. IV" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), pp. 199 f.

8. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 114; in Marlow (*op. cit.*), p. 92.

9. Radhakrishnan, *ibid.*, p. 294; in Marlow (*op. cit.*), p. 95.

10. Radhakrishnan, *ibid.*, p. 61; in Marlow (*op. cit.*), pp. 122 f.

11. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1932); in Marlow (*op. cit.*), pp. 111 f.

12. Radhakrishnan, *East and West*, pp. 26 f; in Marlow (*op. cit.*), p. 114.

13. *The Recovery of Faith* (*op. cit.*), pp. 194–204. ("*Op. cit.*"

as used in these notes indicates that full documentation of author, publisher, and copyright year has been given within the notes of this chapter.)

14. Professor Toynbee followed his gargantuan *A Study of History*, in which much attention was given to the role of religions in historical development, with more specific studies of religion: *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); and *Christianity Among the Religions of the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

Professor Hocking, the American philosopher, was named chairman in 1932 of an American laymen's board of inquiry into the state of Protestant foreign missions. The results of its around-the-world investigation of missionary work and of non-Western cultures were published as *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Report* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932); he later published his Hibbert Lectures under the title, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940). More recently Hocking has restated and elaborated his views in *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

15. F. S. C. Northrop argues in a similar vein in his *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946).

16. Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions* (*op. cit.*), pp. 54 and 81.

17. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), pp. xi f.

18. *Ibid.*, Chapters II–IV.

19. Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (*op. cit.*), Chapter II.

20. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), p. 91.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 137; and Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions* (*op. cit.*), p. 20.

22. Toynbee, *ibid.*

23. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), p. 149.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 125.

25. Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions* (*op. cit.*), pp. 20–28, 85, 104.

26. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), p. 146.

27. Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions* (*op. cit.*), pp. 103 f.

28. Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (*op. cit*), pp. 190-214.

29. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), pp. 157, 81, 158, 136.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-168 and the Epilogue.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 85, 153.

33. Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 238.

34. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (*op. cit.*), pp. 86-108. Cf. Toynbee's similar view in *Christianity Among the Religions* (*op. cit.*), pp. 106 ff, or in *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (*op. cit.*), pp. 292 ff.

ADDITIONAL READING

An influential early discussion which related Christianity to Hinduism as the higher fulfillment of the latter's best aspirations is J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913).

A more general treatment of interreligious questions from the period of Hocking's early work is Nicol Macnicol, *Is Christianity Unique?* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1936).

7. The Counsels of Experts (II)

Conservative Voices in the West

The voices of liberalism in both East and West have not gone unchallenged. The conscious stress of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, Hocking, and Toynbee upon harmony and ultimate unity, on common themes and tempos, has been answered in the West by the resounding dissonance of an emphatic "No!" Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer and others of similar theological perspective have emphasized disharmony and essential discontinuity between the revelation of God in Christ and the world's religions. Their conservative attitude and exclusivistic outlook provide us with a striking study in theological contrast, for they represent a dynamic alternative approach to interreligious affairs which has gained a wide hearing in theological and missionary circles in the West during the last twenty years.

Barth's Revolt Against Liberal Theology

As "father of the prophets" of the neoconservative phase in Protestant theology, Barth began his career as a theological rebel.[1] As early as 1917 this German-Swiss pastor began to be awakened to new conceptions of God and man and the world. Actually, as with many revolutionaries and reformers, Barth's

working principles were latent in his own religious tradition—Calvinistic Protestant thought and experience. They were precipitated into effective form by two powerful catalysts: World War I and the Bible. Barth found himself preaching from the Bible while shells of conflicting armies exploded just across the Swiss border. And he awakened to what he called the "strange new world of the Bible."

This "strange new world" collided head-on with a world which had celebrated the wide acceptance of a liberal version of Christian ethics but which now was convulsed in self-destruction. As a result Barth was forced to re-evaluate and reinterpret the contemporary scene by a new set of theological instruments. The old liberal theology—which had spoken confidently of man's inherent goodness, had preached optimistically of human brotherhood rooted in divine fatherhood, and had striven vigorously to build the kingdom of God here and now—had become bankrupt, supremely irrelevant to the realities of man's existence in history. The quandary of twentieth century man could be rightly and realistically interpreted only in terms which were the common coin of genuine biblical faith, the shared heritage of the spiritual descendants of Calvin and Luther. From these classic sources three central considerations came to dominate Barth's outlook: God's absolutely sovereign lordship; man's inveterate creatureliness and waywardness; and God's unbelievable grace toward helpless man.

Barth portrays God in austere terms. God is so fundamentally distinct from man and all that pertains to him, so utterly holy and beyond comparison with man's power and goodness that he must be spoken of as Wholly Other. And his transcendence or beyondness as Creator of all is matched by his sovereign lordship: he is Judge of men and nations in history, before whom all achievements—even the noblest and best—are as nothing.

Man, by infinite contrast, is a limited and fleeting thing, a mere creature. Man is radically dependent upon the Creator God for his very existence and subject to his judgment in history. The human lot is deeply tragic because of man's inescapable tendency to serve himself first in all things; man is truly cursed, marked by "original sin"—a pride which results in idolizing the human, in putting himself rather than God at the center of his life.

Finally, God's grace is no less decisive for man's final well-being than his judgment. God is man's only Redeemer, who graciously gives himself to man without any merit on man's part. God discloses himself fully and finally to man in Jesus Christ, reconciling man and the world to himself by a supreme and incomparable act of love.

In actuality there is a fourth operating principle in Barth's outlook which in a sense issues from the other three, yet in another sense is the basis from which they spring. This is the Bible itself. As the Bible was the central and overriding authority for Luther and Calvin, so it is for Barth. The Bible is God's Word: as such it is God's unique self-disclosure, a once-for-all revelation of God's nature and will. Its key is the crux and climax of this disclosure: Jesus Christ.

It is from this background that Barth's theology may be brought to bear on the question of interreligious affairs. In Barth's view, revelation (namely, Jesus Christ) is a completely divine reality. Both the disclosure of God in Christ and the authentic response of faith are God's and God's alone. This is utterly distinct from man's religions, including Christianity in its historical form, which represent resistance rather than authentic response to revelation in Christ. Barth can speak of man's religions only as un-faith, so distorted and inadequate and even perverse is their response to God as he really is—that is, in Christ. Religions are not patterns of self-

abandoning surrender to God but self-affirming, self-asserting attempts to gain salvation. They may and do exhibit all manner of good and valuable features, but their separation from the true revelation in Christ brings them under condemnation from the same. To be sure, God's universal sovereignty and his grace mean that men may be redeemed apart from conscious awareness and choice of Christ. And the Christian religion is in itself a creaturely product like all of man's religions. Yet it remains an irreducible affirmation of Christian faith that the saving Word of God was given to the people of God in the event of Jesus Christ. By this gift of the sovereign and gracious Lord of the universe Christianity becomes the true religion and the agency of God's forgiveness and redemption.[2]

It falls to Hendrik Kraemer to develop a more complete statement of conservative, biblically centered Protestantism on the problem of interfaith relations.[3] It will convey some of the distinctive "either/or" flavor of Kraemer's views if the key terms are set down at first in pairs of opposites: divine revelation versus man's religious aspirations, discontinuity and rejection versus continuity and fulfillment, "biblical realism" versus natural theology, the realm of spiritual realities versus human traditions of religious longing and striving. This theological perspective, so clearly influenced by the thought of Karl Barth, must now be elaborated.[4]

The Theological Bases of Kraemer's Position

The two fundamental and controlling assumptions which inform Kraemer's writing are the radical separation of the human and the divine, and the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ as *the* way to truth. From these two primal affirmations plus disciplined study and missionary experience come the special features of Kraemer's thought on the prob-

lems of Christianity and non-Christian religions. It is of the very nature of the Christian revelation, he believes, that it cannot be continuous with the insights and values and strivings of other religions. In "biblical realism," in the description of God's revelation in Christ as found in the Bible, God introduces himself unannounced: no natural theology (statements of God rationally inferred from the natural world), no single religion or series of religions can prepare us for this Event. It is not the climax and fulfillment of developments which we can recognize and analyze by reason and by reference to nature and history. It is *sui generis*, incomparable, transforming, and rejecting rather than fulfilling (in the simple sense of that word) what men have hoped for. If God's sovereign grace and spirit are at work in non-Christian religions, this is a matter that is essentially mysterious. It does not qualify these traditions as being cut from the same cloth as the decisive revelation of God in Christ, for Christ is quite literally the *crux* of all history, the *crisis* or event of judgment upon all human aspirations and accomplishments—religious and otherwise. In Christ the world and its religions—including Christianity as a human and historical tradition—are judged to be hostile toward God and are reconciled to God at a single point in history.

Thus, the voice of Tertullian, a Roman lawyer converted to Christianity in the third century, is heard again in the Church: "What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church?" Tertullian's rigid separation of faith and reason is well represented in Kraemer's denial of any connection between biblical revelation and natural theology. Like the great Hebrew prophet Elijah thirty centuries ago (I Kings 17–19), Kraemer presents us with an either/or choice: we cannot serve two masters. If divine disclosure and the response of faith be the

way of truth, follow it; if rational speculation, search and discovery, longing and insight be the way, then follow it. If there is authentic revelation in Christ, if God has disclosed himself as Truth, any other way is false.

If the reader should complain now that Kraemer is obviously biased in his view, he would meet the reply, "Aren't we all?" Kraemer clearly recognizes that he takes his stand in Christian commitment, within the circle of Christian revelation. But his opponents too must have some standpoint, some operating base, some ultimate loyalty from which all decisions are made. Even the Christian who disagrees with him, says Kraemer, does not achieve a truly objective or neutral standpoint: he must make something like general religious experience, general revelation in nature and history and reason his point of departure in opposition to Kraemer's "biblical realism." This is an impossibly ambiguous and unstable ground for anyone who takes the Bible seriously as the Word of God. Kraemer readily grants that the comparative study of religions can and must be used as a means of understanding the nature and function of religion in its manifold forms. Comparative study may not, must not be used by the Christian, however, as a touchstone; it is not an authoritative and decisive source of guidance in the problems of interreligious affairs. The *Christian religion* as a set of human and historical phenomena is comparable with other religions; *Christian revelation*, "biblical realism," is incomparable.

Kraemer's View of Non-Christian Religions

What, then, can be said about non-Christian religions other than condemnation? Kraemer is convinced that he must speak of them all under such headings as "pagan naturalism" and "hedonism." And he makes a case from the Bible for regarding pagan ways as standing under the wrath

of God.[5] Yet he insists that he must appreciate and gain a sympathetic understanding of these religions; he is never satisfied that the question of the value and truth of non-Christian religions has been answered. Kraemer insists that other faiths must be approached with radical humility and genuine human sympathy. He refuses to ignore or write off arbitrarily the elements of goodness, beauty, and truth outside Christianity. He is convinced that he and the entire Christian community must continue to wrestle with the question of how these positive features apart from the revelation of God in Christ are related to the revelation. If man's religious history is in all its forms—Christian and non-Christian alike—brought under judgment by the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ, how shall we account for both the wayward and self-centered aspects which are hostile to and alienated from God, *and* the aspects of man's religious life which seem to reflect the active working of God outside the Christian revelation?[6]

Despite the dominant notes of exclusiveness and discontinuity, Kraemer's position not only encourages but demands that the questions of how Christians ought to relate themselves to non-Christians be studied intensely and intelligently. As his prolific and influential writing has continued Kraemer has taken greater care to emphasize that he does not seek by his exclusivist position concerning religious truth to increase hostility and conflict among religions. In his latest book Kraemer gives ample evidence of his acceptance of the inevitability of "mutual religious influence and stimulus" in the coming dialogue among religions and cultures. Kraemer also gives here sharp and clear testimony to his own preference and hope for "real communication on the basis of real understanding of self and the other, and not on that of self-assertive competition or premature 'unitarianism' [that is, belief in the

essential agreement of all religions] which confounds the real issues."[7]

* * *

The survey of the opinions of these experts can sustain no claim to completeness. The position of each expert is richer and more complex than these brief accounts suggest. Each is eminently worth reading in full. The aim of this book, however, requires that we press on to an evaluation of the opinions recounted. If there are situations in which an expert is consulted and his opinion comfortably accepted and acted upon, this is not one of them. The sharp differences among the experts consulted demand a critical appraisal of their counsels. The balance of this chapter, therefore, states some of the objections which might be raised against each of the experts. Before the author's own suggestions for a policy of interreligion are offered in the final chapter it is necessary to indicate grounds for refusing to fall in line with any one of the experts.

Objections to Gandhi and Radhakrishnan

For reasons already indicated in the last chapter the views of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan have considerable appeal for many outside as well as inside Asia. For others in the West, including the present writer, this approach to our problem is not satisfactory. Very practically speaking, it would not work. It would be unrealistic in the extreme to suppose that a large proportion of the self-acknowledged and committed Christians (not to mention Jews and Muslims) would renounce the claims of their tradition and experience to accept a blueprint drawn up by non-Christians. This they could only regard as in effect a mass conversion to Hinduism, something which Gandhi and Radhakrishnan have fought vigorously when the direction of conversion is from Hinduism to an-

other faith. If it is possible at all to reach genuine human community without fundamental compromise of religious loyalty, this is not the path which will take us there. Are we willing to assume at the outset, for example, that all religious experience is essentially one and equally valid irrespective of its creedal expression? This Hindu dogma, so well and often stated by Radhakrishnan, is something to be investigated; it may be assumed and affirmed by the convinced Hindu, but it can be no more than a major item on the agenda in efforts to explore realms of community among world religions.[8] Otto's study of *Mysticism East and West* counsels against the easy acceptance of the common Hindu claim. There Otto demonstrated that despite numerous significant similarities in both thought and experience between the Hindu philosopher Shankara and the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, equally significant differences preclude simple identification of the two.[9]

Another of Radhakrishnan's formulations may be taken to represent the position voiced in so many ways in Hinduism: there can be *no* decisively superior views about God or ways of seeking or responding to God. The reason for this is that the God or Ultimate Reality which is variously represented in man's religions is both one (rather than many) and fundamentally unknowable to man. Therefore, says Radhakrishnan, it is impossible that one view and one type of religious response should turn out to be superior, closer to truth than others. The Hindu view, commonly extolled as tolerant and flexible, strangely becomes dogmatic and rigid about the absolute necessity of tolerance and flexibility! In other words, the main point to be pressed against the Hindu point of view of equalitarian tolerance is that the existence of many diverse conceptions and beliefs about God, or the ultimate Source of all things, does not in any convincing way deny the possibility that some of these conceptions and beliefs are truer than

others or that one is nearer the truth than all the rest. To be sure, we are left with the problem of knowing how to identify the true or more nearly true conceptions. But in the interest of truth itself this burden must be accepted.

Objections to Hocking and Toynbee

One criticism that must be voiced against the liberal views and proposals of Western spokesmen is that they are too rationalistic to be realistic. It is perhaps an occupational handicap shared by these eminent scholars that the issues of life and society are seen too exclusively in intellectualistic categories. One often gets the impression from academicians that all that really needs to be done to achieve right results in any particular enterprise is to straighten out our ways of thinking. Hocking's main proposal of "reconception" encourages this reaction: it suggests that complex human dilemmas are to be solved simply with the mind. He speaks of the Way of Reconception in terms of essences. And revelation for him is for the most part absorbed by such categories as "perception" and "progressive search."

Moreover, the emphasis of these men on the universals of religions, the common and unlosable essences of religions, gives too little attention to the fuller picture of religions as they are actually lived. Toynbee is especially culpable here. His insistence on separating the essentials from the nonessentials in religions is too rationalistic, too neat. And his discussion of such features as creeds, theologies, mythologies, liturgies, and practices as dispensable is not sound: he says that he wants to remove the "nonessential practices and propositions" from "essential . . . spiritual counsels and truths" in order that the latter can be rationally accepted.

Fortunately, Toynbee is not altogether consistent in stating his case. As indicated earlier in this chapter he at times exhibits a clear-sighted appreciation of the local rootage of

religions which is in agreement with Hocking's analysis. These experts have the merit of avoiding Aldous Huxley's chimerical attempt to provide modern man with a "perennial philosophy," religion in "its chemically pure form," distinct from any of its compound forms in particular historical and cultural settings. Nevertheless, they do not avoid giving the over-all impression of understanding religions in a too intellectualistic way.

A still more fundamental stricture against the views of Hocking and Toynbee concerns their shared principle that all religions are in essence one. The essential oneness of religions, they say, can be identified through rational analysis of the constituting experiences and expressions within various religions. In Hocking's case, at least, this principle appears to be a presupposition of idealist philosophy. In any case, whether assumption or conclusion, the essential oneness of religions—like the operating principles of Radhakrishnan and of Kraemer—is something to be investigated and explored; it is a possibility, but not an assured reality to be presupposed in formulating a policy of interreligion. We may readily affirm with Hocking that the ultimate source of truth is one; this legitimate philosophical assumption stimulates and guides us toward a policy which will facilitate deeper understanding of divergent claims to truth among the religions. We must as readily reject Kraemer's denial that genuine revelation is at the roots of non-Christian religions; and this rejection helps to prepare the ground for such a policy. But to what extent and at what points revelation of ultimate reality and truth is present in man's religions, and whether the universals proposed by Hocking and Toynbee are indeed of the essence of man's religions—these are questions and possibilities to be explored rather than maps ready-made for the expedition.

There are, of course, many other questions which ought to be asked of these men and their views. For example, Toynbee

should be questioned at such points as these: To what degree does his view of interreligious affairs in terms of tolerance stem from a utilitarianism which in turn arises from his understanding of the course of human history? It is his thesis that the relationship between religions and political structures is so intimate that states and civilizations may be said to have fallen not only due to fatal international wars but also to the fostering of one religion at the expense of others; official support of a religion, Toynbee believes, corrupts and weakens that religion, and so the state falls because of weakened moral and spiritual fiber. Now if what Toynbee calls an "ecumenical state" should allow or foster *all* higher religions, and if no single religion were compromised and morally corrupted by official sponsorship, then all higher religions would retain their moral vigor, and the spiritual strength of the state or civilization would be upheld.

Therefore, one is tempted to suspect that the real source of Toynbee's religious tolerance is his concern to find a way of preventing the fall of civilizations, which is so regular and familiar a phenomenon to the world historian. This is disappointing when it is set alongside the judgment by Toynbee himself that utilitarian motives should not determine future movements toward a universalization of religious faith. It is also unsatisfactory because it too easily plays into the hands of guardians of the *status quo*. It is one thing to urge more concerted positive consideration of interreligious affairs on the utilitarian ground that successful efforts toward world community and the survival of higher civilization in the nuclear age require intercultural understanding on the level at which religion operates. It is something else to call for the banding together of religions and spiritually oriented persons in an alliance to oppose historical movements and forces which are deemed inimical to a spiritual conception of life. The latter appeal lays religion open once again to the fre-

quently legitimate charge that religion is the captive of vested interests which allows itself to be used as a barrier against change. Religion and religions are thus made to serve interests more parochial than humanity as a whole.

As for the theologians, they need not pitch their tents with Kraemer to see theological foibles in Toynbee's writings. Some will be bound to ask how accurately his term "harmony" characterizes man's goal in the higher religions ("To come into harmony with Absolute Reality"); it seems to do less than justice to dynamic biblical presentations of life in the presence of God. Others will insist that Toynbee betrays theological naïveté when he advises us to break out of the "Original Sin" of self-centeredness by simply interesting ourselves in other persons and peoples. If this is an adequate theological analysis of man's quandary, then the spiritual battles of the apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Luther, Kierkegaard, and millions of struggling Christians can only be regarded as pitiable hallucinations!

Finally, it may be asked whether Toynbee improves upon the dogmatism of Radhakrishnan in his apparent conviction that a unique and special revelation of the divine is *impossible.*[10] If we have objected to Radhakrishnan's paradoxical dogmatism, we must also object when it appears in Toynbee's position.

Objections to Kraemer

Can we, then, align ourselves at the opposite end of the spectrum with the conservative views of Kraemer? The all-important question to be asked of Kraemer's impressive efforts is this: What understanding of the Christian gospel does it reflect? The question is doubly important because right understanding of the gospel is what might be called the trunk line of the current theological awakening. From it every particular concern with the authority of the Bible or

the nature of the Church or the place of the sacraments must spring, and with it they must maintain contact. This serves to reiterate the assertion of Chapter 1 that a serious wrestling with the claims and challenges of other religions is an integral part of the widely felt need for theological self-understanding—namely, for seeking the meaning of our faith and the relevance of the gospel.

Revelation is to be defined in Kraemer's terms as acts of God for man's salvation. Or in his own words: "Revelation is an act of God, an act of divine grace . . . by which He condescends to reveal His Will and His Heart. . . ."[11] In contrast with "biblical realism" non-Christian religions deal only with "religious experiences and ideas."[12] This contrast certainly has point; but taken in unqualified form in which Kraemer often states it, it is highly questionable. As H. H. Farmer shrewdly observed shortly after Kraemer's book had been discussed at the Tambaram missionary conference in 1938, this view of revelation which restricts it to the incarnation of God in Christ is so narrow that denial of divine revelation to other religions follows as a matter of course. Must we not ask by what license Kraemer distinguishes the revelation in "biblical realism" so completely from all other claims to revelation? He would probably answer that the biblical record of revelation itself testifies to the finality and once-for-all character of the revelation of God in Christ. This being so, however, it at least becomes a question for serious investigation whether these restrictive views of divine disclosure in the Bible are as much "religious ideas" of the men who received the revelation as they are part of God's very revelation. Does not the Bible *also* deal with religious experiences and ideas in the light and in the midst of which God's revealing and saving activity are apprehended, interpreted, and at least partly understood? Is it not a too nice and clear separation to say that the Bible is *only* the record

of God's acts toward man instead of a collection of accounts of man's search for God? Does not the Bible include both?

Actually, Kraemer also has found it difficult to state a wholly consistent position. He qualifies his own severe separation of revealed and nonrevealed religions. "In a more external sense all religions, not excepting the 'primitive' ones, can be called religions of revelation." Yet he would maintain some kind of distinction in the concept of revelation: "Revelation is not at all characteristic of [the non-Semitic religions], and moreover, what they consider to be revelation is of a quite different character from what the religions of revelation [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam] understand by it."[13] Kraemer attempts to distinguish further between authentic revelation—the divine self-disclosure in God's relations with his covenant people which culminated in the full revelation in Jesus Christ—and secondary "revelation," which he finds in nature, history, human conscience; even the Light that was coming into the world (John 1:9) is "*qualitatively* speaking in a different category from His revelation in Israel."[14]

If it be granted that the element of revelation is not so "characteristic" or typical or predominant in Asian religions as in the Semitic religions, it must be asserted that the crucial point for our purpose is whether there has been *any* authentic disclosure of the One True God outside biblical experience. The real question about this distinction between revelation and religion is whether the "religious consciousness," the universal phenomenon of man's awareness of Transcendence, can be excluded from the realm of revelation. It is encouraging that in *Religion and the Christian Faith* (page 146) Kraemer treats this phenomenon very positively; he repeatedly states the right, the essential question: "Has . . . religious consciousness . . . anything to do with the God of revelation? Has the God of revelation anything to do with it? If not, why not? If so, why and how?"

We have seen already that he also seeks to clarify the ambiguity of his earlier statements about revelation by expounding the "dialectical" view of the Bible itself. That is, the Bible, on the one hand, pronounces all religions irrespective of their quality "false religion" in that they do not respond to the truth—that is, do not know and honor the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Father of Jesus Christ.[15] On the other hand, there is outside the realm of revelation in Christ "evidence of God's uninterrupted concern and of His travailing with man. . . . Therefore, all religion is meaningful in some sense, as a dim response or as a refusal towards God's working. Even in its vanity it is not meaningless. It is, above all, meaningful because it is the dimension where the . . . relatedness to God, . . . man's being met by God, bursts open. . . ."[16]

Anyone who is aware of the magnitude of the problem before us will receive with a sense of relief these more positive words from Kraemer. Unfortunately, however, his first principles continually reassert themselves in his later as well as his earlier writings. It appears that if we begin where Kraemer begins—by narrowing the range of revelation in advance to "biblical realism" (his own understanding of biblical revelation)—we cannot avoid coming to Kraemer's conclusion. The narrowness of Kraemer's position even in his later writing is demonstrated when he responds to a query of A. G. Hogg. The experienced missionary and theological teacher had asked why Kraemer's separation between revelation in Christ and the Christian religion could not be applied to other religions. Why should we not distinguish between the revelatory core of Hinduism and the Hinduism we can observe in history? No comparable distinction can be made legitimately, says Kraemer, for the simple reason that the genuine revelation of God in the Bible is discontinuous with

anything else. He can permit only a distinction between poorer and more excellent representations of other religions. By initial assumption Kraemer denies that authentic divine self-disclosure occurs outside the sacred history of the Bible.[17]

It is just here that the weakest point of Kraemer's position is laid bare. Although he takes his starting point within the realm of *Christian* revelation, he acknowledges a legitimate ground for criticism in the impossibility of knowing how far this revelation corresponds to any statement about it. How can anyone make Christian revelation the absolute criterion when any understanding of Christian revelation is admittedly partial, distorted, defective? According to Kraemer the only possible remedy is guidance by the Holy Spirit into a gradual "deepening of insight, sensitivity and pureness of judgment." This is hardly an adequate defense of Kraemer's thesis of discontinuity as between Christian revelation and world religions, for Kraemer has also acknowledged that God's sovereign grace and love have been at work through the Spirit to produce acceptable men of faith apart from Christ.[18]

In summary it may be said that Kraemer states the available alternatives too baldly: "The crucial question for Christians is: Is Christ the measure of true religion, or is it some general religious *a priori* [that is, already affirmed standard of judgment] by which Christ has to be measured? Christians cannot behave as if there were an ultimate religious *a priori* under which Christ is subsumed. For them Christ is the religious *a priori*."[19] But there is a third alternative for Christians (and perhaps for non-Christians): the religious *a priori* of the Living God who showed himself to us most fully (so far as we have known) in Christ. We need not deny that God has authentically disclosed himself outside the Bible in order to confess existentially that God's revelation in Christ puts all other revelations or claims to revelation under judgment, showing their inadequacies, error, and perversion in

various ways and degrees. As a judgment of faith rather than a statement of interreligious policy this does not destroy common ground. It may be believed deeply that the revelation in Christ corrects all other revelations, cuts across and, in a sense, denies all religious longings and awareness that do not spring from and reflect the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But this does not mean that the one God who reveals himself so wondrously in Jesus Christ has not been seeking also a positive response from those who have not known Christ, however misleading and erroneous and inadequate in some ways their apprehension of the divine Reality has been. Our conviction that it is the One True God who is thus revealed forbids us to preclude in advance that God has also *authentically* revealed himself to the religious consciousness of man outside the biblical history.

* * *

The net result of these negative judgments upon the counsels of the experts is that neither close-minded exclusivism nor extreme and perhaps empty tolerance is acceptable. Central assumptions of the liberal formulations cannot be granted, and we must remain alert to the dangers of a too rationalistic approach. Kraemer provides needed correctives against the tendency to deal neatly with revelation by means of reason. He keeps us mindful that as Christians we must always find our starting point in some sense *within* Christian faith and its response to divine self-disclosure. Our task can never be only one of detached analysis and formulation.

With equal stress we must assert that the views of Barth and Kraemer are in need of the corrective to which Hocking calls us. They are subject to nothing less than a kind of rationalism of their own! Their insistence upon the unqualified sovereignty and authority of the revealing God and upon a biblicism of the "theology of the Word" or of "biblical real-

ism" are less compelling because of the extremes into which their thoroughness in rational formulation has led them. If Hocking tends to grant human reason too much scope in locating revelation, in identifying Christianity's unlosable essence, Kraemer errs in trying to settle the problem in the opposite way. The tension between divine revelation and human reason will never be satisfactorily solved by exalting either at the expense of the other. This may mean that we are marked for an unending attempt to deal with logically irreconcilable elements of revelation and reason. They will be reconciled in the future only as they have been reconciled in the past: in the unresolved tension of *living* with both and by both in humility and faith. This means in turn that we must be ready to learn and relearn from both Hocking and Kraemer in the twofold task before us: interpreting and understanding the revelation of truth which we have received (and which we may yet receive); and understanding the thoughts and convictions of those outside our own religious community when they lay claim to religious truth.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. A very brief introduction to Barth's thought is E. L. Allen's *The Sovereignty of God and the Word of God: a Guide to the Thought of Karl Barth* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

2. In this connection two sections in Barth's most authoritative work are especially relevant: *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956–1959), Volume I 2, pp. 297–361; and Volume IV 3.

3. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938); *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956); and *World Cultures and World Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960).

4. Kraemer's criticisms of Barth show that his dependence is not

slavish. See *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (*op. cit.*), p. 120, and *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), Chapter XX.

5. See especially Chapters XVII and XVIII in *Religion and the Christian Faith*.

6. This more "dialectical" view of man's religions as both a reflection and a perversion of contact with God indicates a change from Kraemer's earlier position despite his own disclaimer of any fundamental change in his view: see *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), pp. 191–196, and Chapters IX, XVII, and XVIII. Kraemer's first book had followed closely Barth's understanding of religions as forms of human self-assertion and unbelief.

7. *World Cultures and World Religions* (*op. cit.*), pp. 14 f; see also *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 350.

8. Radhakrishnan himself has not consistently affirmed an unqualified view of the equality of religions, whether among the branches of Hinduism or among world religions. "Hinduism does not mistake tolerance for indifference. It affirms that while all revelations refer to reality, they are not equally true to it": *The Hindu View of Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1927), p. 49. Radhakrishnan resorts to a familiar device of Hindu philosophers by referring to different levels or planes in the apprehension of truth, and this moves him off the dead center of a flat and unlifelike conception of religions. This does not, however, overcome the strong impression that his position is so enamored of the idea of shades of gray that it cannot countenance claims that black and white exist.

9. D. G. Moses argues a slightly different point against Radhakrishnan on much the same basis, and he provides a more detailed critique of assumptions and affirmations: *Religious Truth and the Relations Between Religions* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1950), pp. 97 ff. Kraemer also devotes very critical chapters to Radhakrishnan's views in *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), Chapters IV and V.

10. See especially his discussion of challenges to the claim of

uniqueness in Chapter X of *An Historian's Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).

11. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (*op. cit.*), p. 118.

12. *The Authority of the Faith* I, "The Madras Series" (New York: International Missionary Council, 1939), p. 1. So in his later book, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), pp. 232 f.

13. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (*op. cit.*), pp. 142 and 146; cited by J. Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 44.

14. *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 382.

15. Kraemer's debt to Luther and Calvin is very heavy here: see *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), pp. 170 ff.

16. From *Religion and the Christian Faith* by Hendrik Kraemer. Published 1957, The Westminster Press. Used by permission. Pages 340 f, 316, 321, 333.

17. See *The Authority of the Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 98, and *Religion and the Christian Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 227.

18. *The Authority of the Faith* (*op. cit.*), pp. 4 and 7.

19. From *Religion and the Christian Faith* by Hendrik Kraemer. Published 1957, The Westminster Press. Used by permission. Page 145.

ADDITIONAL READING

Two books are of special value in that they review and evaluate from opposing standpoints informed opinion from the Church Fathers to the present: Hendrik Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, already cited in the notes; and A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, "The Library of Constructive Theology" (London: James Nisbet & Company, Ltd., 1958). A much shorter historical and evaluative survey is E. L. Allen, *Christianity Among the Religions* (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1960).

8. Community Without Compromise

Toward a Policy of Interreligion

Is this really possible? Is it a realistic hope that interreligious community can be accomplished without surrender of the sense of peculiar identity? The daring of this hope is plain if we take a political analogy from the international scene: while world public opinion presses ever more vigorously for a peaceful world community, each national unit—whether old or young—insists on participating in this new world community as a separate and sovereign entity. The emerging nations of Africa are a good case in point of the difficulty of community without compromise of peculiar identity. Indeed, the analogy might be pressed to an even broader common basis in interpersonal relations: every individual faces his own problem of community without compromise in the sense of seeking a viable pattern of relating himself to other persons and to his society which will at once establish constructive mutuality and safeguard rights and potentialities of individual persons. Put in more explicitly Christian terms: Is there an understanding of the Christian faith which permits and even impels the faithful to seek a more intimate fellowship, a higher level of reciprocal scrutiny and mutual accept-

ance among man's religious perspectives while yet preserving a consciousness of particular commitment?

We must work toward a policy for interreligious affairs, just as those in the executive arm of government are responsible for formulating policies of interaction with other nations. If they fail in this responsibility, the nation muddles through a morass of stopgap measures which have neither unity nor direction and which only contribute to confusion. So if we as Christians fail to evolve a consistent and clear view of how the challenges of interreligious rivalry should be met, we shall betray our responsibilities to seek the truth, to understand and live aright our faith, to nurture the well-being of the Christian community and of mankind.

A plausible strategy in seeking guidelines toward this goal is the appeal to authority. We all make this appeal in some aspects of our individual and corporate lives. The authority may be the nuclear physicist, the set of life values which dominates our culture, or the family physician. So in this question of how we ought to look upon and act in Christian-non-Christian, East-West relationships we may well ask ourselves: What authorities are we ready to appeal to in search of solutions?

Consider three authorities which have their respective roles to play here: the authority of experts in consensus (that is, where they agree); the "circumstantial" authority, or what is demanded by the total situation in which we find ourselves at this time; and theological authority, or a kind of theology of interreligion. May it not be that a sane pattern of response to other religions can be developed by drawing upon each of these authorities in search of community without compromise? Indeed, we may ask whether it is good common sense or simple honesty to expect solutions apart from any one of these authorities.

THE AUTHORITY OF CONSENSUS

After noting the fundamental differences that throw experts into *dis*agreement in this matter, it may appear ill-advised to begin a statement of constructive proposals by reference to their common ground. Yet the measure of sharing and of agreement is significant. And we may rightly believe that we are using a firm foundation whenever we build on the common witness and points of convergence which are found in otherwise divergent testimony of experts.

The most obvious consensus among them is their unanimous judgment that it is a good thing to pursue seriously and diligently a deeper, richer, and more accurate knowledge of other religions and cultures. The relatively restrictive approach of Kraemer, for example, embodies an insistence on the fullest possible knowledge of other traditions. Whether the motive be missionary interest, intellectual integrity, a pragmatic concern to reduce international tension, or a combination of all these, Kraemer agrees firmly with the others that accurate knowledge and understanding is an indispensable plank in any platform for interreligious relations.

The experts are also agreed that the living religious perspectives and traditions of mankind are stable realities. In seeking to state a satisfactory philosophy of interreligious relations we must deal with *particular* religions. The liberal views expounded by Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, Hocking and Toynbee make it clear that at least at the outset of our enterprise we cannot escape the "scandal of particularity." It cannot be ignored in the efforts toward the truly universal faith proposed by Hocking and Toynbee. It is valued by Gandhi as the cultural rootage of individuals in which they find form and direction and meaning in their lives. It nourishes the roots of Kraemer's "biblical realism."

Hocking and Toynbee stress this point less consistently

than Kraemer. They should not be understood, however, as representing a kind of amorphous movement toward a universal religious amalgam, which would be repulsive to Kraemer. These men are not impressed by a syncretism or artificially constructed universal faith. It is fairer to their positions to say that both look for the emergence of a world faith out of the competition and co-operation of the present religions of the world. Hocking, especially, insists that particularity as well as universality is essential to such a world faith.

Thus, the limited agreement among our experts makes it clear that our quest for a truthful and workable policy of interreligious relations does not point toward doing away with the historic religions. John Dewey's proposal twenty years ago that *religious attitudes toward "ideal possibilities"* should be developed without reference to the traditions and teachings and practices of organized religions would command little support from the positions we have examined (although some of Radhakrishnan's and Toynbee's statements may appear to point in this direction). If any world faith emerges along with Hocking's "coming world civilization" or Toynbee's "ecumenical state," it will have to be a purged and purified and perfected version of one of today's living faiths.

This common ground among the experts in insisting upon the particularity, the relativity, the "rootedness" of religion now and in the future does not obscure their insistence that the peculiar forms which religions assume are strictly secondary. Kraemer will not agree with his opponents (and vice versa) as to what in the religious life of mankind is *not* relative and limited, particular and secondary: Kraemer's insistence upon a unique revelation in biblical realism is poles apart from any notion of a universal essence underlying all religions. Nevertheless, Kraemer puts little stock in absolute claims for man's religions, including Christian religion: all

of man's religions are imperfect and faulty instruments of man's religious consciousness. Here, at least, he is not far from the others even though they diverge widely over the implications they see in the fact that particular religions are in many respects relative to the time and culture in which they function and are therefore incapable of possessing the truth in their own right.

So, if we seek a measure of guidance on the authority of points of agreement among our experts we find, on the one hand, assurance that the living religions of man are not to be jettisoned in the interests of a contrived superreligion. On the other hand, we receive consistent testimony for an ecumenical spirit: the separate, relative, cultural forms of the religions are secondary in importance, and other living traditions deserve the Christian's diligent study. To be sure, the motives for seeking greater understanding vary, and the experts do not agree on just what is of primary importance in man's higher religions or in how Christians should relate that which is primary in their own faith and life to what non-Christians take to be primary in theirs. For additional guidance in these matters we turn to the "circumstantial" and the theological authorities.

THE AUTHORITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES

What do we gain through an appeal to "circumstantial" authority, to the inferences which can be drawn legitimately from the total situation of the modern world in which the Christian community finds itself? Here as elsewhere the range of available data is vast and complex, yet its treatment must be fragmentary and selective.

Any serious and honest accounting of the contemporary situation in world affairs uncovers very grim facts. They are at once easy to see and painful to look at: one world or

none! If, as Hocking and Toynbee assure us, the conditions necessary for the emergence of world community are largely present, its coming to birth will nevertheless be extremely difficult. The sounds of revolution are heard throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The rivalries of autonomous national states make us quail before the prospect of open conflict and nuclear holocaust.

Superiority and Survival

Circumstantial authority can speak some words of counsel very plainly to an intelligent concern with interreligious policy. Any policy, for instance, which breathes the air of an inherent superiority of one culture over another constitutes a danger to humanity's survival. It is extremely doubtful that Kraemer's earnest attempt to distinguish the discontinuity of the claim for Christian revelation from any *human* claims, whether religious or cultural, will have allayed the suspicions of many. As long as dogmatic claims to finality and uniqueness (and by implication to superiority) are made from within any particular cultural framework—be it Western Christian or Asian Hindu—other religions and cultures must in the nature of things resist it. Spiritual imperialism will receive no more hospitable welcome in the modern world than political or economic or cultural imperialism. If it is indeed true that one set of religious truth claims is superior in validity to all others, this must emerge as the end-term in the course of more extended and intimate mutual exposure of the religions than has yet taken place. Kraemer's picture of a culture-transcending and absolute truth in the revelation of God in Christ may rightly have significant impact upon fellow Christians *as an existential or personal religious confession;* indeed, *as religious confession* it may in the long run influence even those who stand outside the Christian com-

munity and tradition. But as a formula for communication and as a principle of policy for interreligious relationships it can only arouse that religious and cultural counterpart of national pride: rejection of alien claims and lodging of counterclaims of an equally exclusive character.

The interests of survival itself require that religion's role in the world scene be positive and constructive, that religions comport themselves in an atmosphere of earnest mutuality rather than incipient conflict. If religions are to show their capacity to be binding cement rather than divisive forces in the present situation, there must be openness rather than animosity among them. The achievement of at least a working compatibility, an ability to communicate on deeper levels despite recognized differences would place religions at the forefront of man's groping movement toward a world without war.

This much of the guidance of "circumstantial" authority can be read, as it were, off the surface of things. More deeply imbedded in the circumstances of our time, however, may be found the basis of more radical counsel for a right policy of interreligion.

The Fact of Vulnerability

Vulnerability is one of the most pervasive and widely attested actualities of life in our age. Modern life at all levels reflects what the prophets of our day have preached for long, what our poets sing in minor key: man exists in vulnerability. Man's existence has ever been perilous—spiritually and physically. Individual persons, for example, are vulnerable to one another and to life. Their defensive equipment is pitifully inadequate: they can be hit, damaged, extinguished from the earth in a thousand ways. And they can be more subtly transformed—tempted, influenced, twisted against their own bet-

ter judgment and in violation of their own image of themselves.

As with individuals, so with corporate units: nations and even civilizations are vulnerable. Even in mighty America we exist in vulnerability. We are vulnerable as all nations and civilizations are vulnerable to unwanted influence and uninvited change, to decay in morale and public morality, to space-launched nuclear weapons. In military and in ideological terms this is a recent development. But its impact is known to anyone who is but vaguely aware of what is being said in defense and diplomatic circles or who sees the growth of a fear-inspired and fanatical type of Americanism in the 1950's and 1960's.

Is there any part of our common life where we are *in*-vulnerable? Christians have heretofore thought of themselves or of their Church or tradition as religiously invulnerable, immune to alien challenge. But this can no longer be the case in what has come to be called the post-Christian era. No religion which after nearly 2,000 years of missionary effort is professed by only five per cent of the world's population outside of Europe and the Americas can claim invulnerability. No religion which in its twentieth century finds alien faiths proselytizing in its home territory can rightly claim invulnerability. And no religious person can claim invulnerability for a religion that has undergone the fundamental alterations experienced by Christianity in its confrontation with Greek philosophy and modern science.

What can be the meaning for the encounter between religions of this radical insecurity, this pervasive vulnerability of man's existence? One does not read easily the signs of our times, or interpret them lightly. Circumstantial authority does not speak its counsel so plainly here. Yet it is difficult to believe that so universal a fact does not have bearing on the

attitudes and postures which religions assume toward one another.

If we cannot deny its reality or turn away from it in panic, how shall we respond? A popular saying has it that "when things are at their worst, they have to get better." A sharper formulation of this bit of half-facetious folk-wisdom is that life is seldom tidy, comfortable, and secure in areas and times of greatest potential creativity. May it not be that the difficult and threatening circumstances of today carry in them rare possibilities for creativity? Could it be that the most hopeful and at the same time the most realistic and courageous response to the inescapable is to embrace it, consciously to acknowledge and appropriate it?

If "circumstantial" authority is to be given any weight in determining the general character of interreligious relationships, it calls for a policy of confrontation in openness and mutuality and possibly in a chastened sense of vulnerability. At the present stage of the discussion this amounts only to a clue. The primary justification and some of the features of such a policy of interreligion must be sought in terms of theological authority; it can be seriously maintained only to the degree that it correlates positively with a cogent and relevant theology of interreligion.

III THEOLOGICAL AUTHORITY

In its deepest dimension the issue of interreligious relations must be met in the light of the religions themselves. As far as the West is concerned no answer to the question which confronts us will be acceptable unless it is understood to be consonant with the nature of Christian faith. Therefore the final and decisive center of authority to which any proposals for interreligion must appeal is theological.

The appeal to theological authority was actually initiated

in the previous chapter. Hints of a theology of interreligion began to appear in the objections raised against each of the experts; evaluation of their views necessarily brought into play certain commitments and bases of judgment, certain religious understandings which are held by the evaluator as authoritative. We must now seek to make explicit some of the essential theological elements of a policy for interreligion which is preferable to those of the experts. What is the theological basis or vital center, and what are some characteristic features of a policy which is capable of promoting world community without religious compromise?

A Starting Point in Revelation

The initial term or theological basis in the policy to be outlined is an acknowledgment of the crucial role of revelation. The conception of revelation must be less narrow and restrictive than Kraemer's "biblical realism," while at the same time avoiding the opposite extreme which fails to give revelation its due. Revelation is to be understood not as divine truths or doctrines, true propositions or statements or teachings about reality. Nor is it virtually identical with discovery and reason, as the German philosopher Lessing understood it. (He incorporated revelation into his conception of religion as "the education of the race.") Lessing's countryman Schelling was nearer the mark in observing that all religions express through their mythologies not general truths or reasonable statements about reality: they seek to express revelations, disclosures of the divine. This a-rational divine self-disclosure, this divine entry into time and history in a way that supersedes or confounds reason, is better understood in more fully personal terms: it not only illuminates the understanding, but transforms and redeems him who confronts and responds to it in his total being, as a whole person.

One of the most significant consequences of this conception of revelation as personal rather than intellectual, existential rather than propositional, is that statements and claims about divine self-disclosure will be more or less, but always in some degree, inaccurate. If that which is disclosed comes from beyond our rational powers—if it is a-rational or supra-rational—none of our attempts to talk about it rationally can be wholly adequate to their high purpose. All statements and claims *about* the revelation are primarily reflective and intellectual in character; they are products of human minds which are limited by the power of human passions, distorted in some measure by particular historical circumstances. Therefore all statements about and claims for divine revelation to men must be regarded as falling short of the glory of God about which they speak: all are subject to error and distortion through the process of rational formulation.

This does not mean that the total personal response to revelation is undercut or made untenable by the inadequacies of verbal expressions about revelation. Nevertheless, it does imply a fundamental distinction between two aspects of revelation: the moment of personal disclosure and response, and any attempts to speak about or to theologize upon that moment.

The teachings of Jesus, for example, are not exempt from this distinction; they should be understood in both ways. On the one hand, they are a manifestation of the disclosure of God in Jesus Christ, to whom the believer responds in full and redeeming confidence. On the other hand, Jesus' teachings express God's grace and God's demand in terms that are psychologically and historically conditioned; attempts systematically to state and apply their meaning—in the New Testament and in all subsequent centuries of Christian theology—are open to faithful but critical re-examination and restatement. In other words, the Christian is one who responds

totally—from the depths of his thinking, feeling, and willing self—to God's self-disclosure in the life and teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But while the Christian is aware of the necessity for speaking about revelation (the need for theology), he is aware at the same time of the limitations and tentativity of theological formulations and interpretations.

Such a conception of revelation deals most justly with what we know about man and his religions. It meets with high seriousness the essential facts of the personal nature of man and of the a-rational or suprarational character of revelation as a disclosure of Reality itself. It also has implications for the approach to interreligious affairs which correlate well with counsel that has been drawn from the consensus of experts and from circumstances in the world. It takes us into a no-man's land between the authoritarian order of Kraemer's exclusive and discontinuous "biblical realism," and the smothering embrace of Radhakrishnan's practical agnosticism and equalitarianism. The danger from both sides is real; safety does not lie in surrender to the one camp or to the other. Starting from our base in a personal conception of revelation, we must pass through this middle ground, accepting its risks and not knowing how far we must travel. We choose to tread the slippery path between dogmatic exclusivism and dogmatic tolerance because we insist upon the freedom to take seriously any religion's claim to derive from authentic revelation. This will arouse suspicions from both extremes and call forth charges of "selling out" to the other side. These, too, must be endured as annoying but not particularly convincing manifestations of cold-war mentality.

Personal Revelation and the Bible

The question will be raised, however, whether the direction and tenor of our theological approach to interreligious affairs

as indicated thus far has a secure basis in the Bible. It hardly needs saying that Christians and most especially Protestants must do justice to the Bible in their appeal to theological authority. Is there any sanction from the Bible for a genuinely open and positive conception of our relationship to non-Christian religions?

The policy toward which we are being drawn is not only justified but demanded by central features of the biblical heritage. Some of these features may be identified in the picture of God which is conveyed by the Bible. God is portrayed there as Lord and Judge of history and Seeker after all men on terms of devoted and righteous fellowship. The relevance of this understanding of God to the question of interreligion is unmistakable. God's lordship and judgment over men and nations in history cannot be separated from the modern situation of a nascent world community which carries within it both threat and promise for mankind. The present age is one freighted with *religious* crisis, if we read the times in biblical idiom. Never before has the community of Christendom which has historically claimed a unique role in the divine governance and purposes of history—never has "the people of God" been so radically challenged by peoples who either hold such conceptions in scorn, claim them as their own, or have no appreciation of them at all.

Does this state of things happen except as a scene in the drama of God's sovereign lordship in history? This is one question which conservative and evangelical Christian groups must ask of themselves, and which all Christians would do well to ponder. Even those who stand outside a strongly evangelical and missionary understanding of Christian faith cannot surrender a modified conception of the ultimate divine rulership of human history. Indeed, it may be precisely the contemporary emergence of an unstable and vulnerable world

community of rival nationalisms and religions which will bring them to a fresh appreciation of this prophetic element in their religious heritage.[1] And if the import of this heritage becomes clear, must we not seek to conduct ourselves in the arena of history in a new way? Must we not face realistically the vulnerability of man's existence in religious as well as in historical terms as we relate ourselves to man's religions? Must we not go forth to meet men of other cultures and religions clad in a humility which enables us both to witness to what we know and to listen to what we may not know?

The difficulty here is that the presence of God's judgment in the present situation might be read from another theological point of view in exclusive terms: are we not again faced with the choice which the prophet Elijah put before the "people of God" almost three millennia ago (I Kings 17–19) —between an easy syncretism or blending with Canaanite religion and a faithful exclusivism? If these were the only alternatives, a realistic interpretation of the Bible would come out on the side of exclusivism. What is being suggested in the alternative interpretation of the present situation, however, is not syncretism or religious relativism.

To make this clear, another aspect of the biblical portrait of God must be highlighted. In Jesus Christ the Christian community has found a continuation and revolutionary culmination of historical reflections of *the seeking God*. From the beginning of the biblical drama God seeks a covenant relationship of loyalty, obedience, and fellowship with man. He seeks man's binding but freely chosen response through the agencies of Adam and Noah, Abraham and Moses, the prophets and finally Jesus the Christ. From the standpoint of Christian faith there is in Jesus Christ a radical increase in the depth and extent of the divine seeking: Never before had the universal scope of this Seeker-God's activity been so fully

disclosed or so dramatically enacted; never before had the Lord of men and nations *become man.*

Now, the crucial question for our decision among the alternatives before us is not *whether* this new depth of the divine self-disclosure is relevant to all mankind. The New Testament church answered this very readily in its consciousness of a demand to carry the good news "into all the world" and in its awareness that through Christ the dividing walls of hostility between God's chosen people and outsiders are destroyed: in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (Mark 16:15; Ephesians 2:11 ff; Galatians 3:28). The crucial question is rather *how* this is to be accomplished, in what spirit this proclamation of what God has done is to be communicated and offered to all men.

The "Uniqueness" of the Revelation in Christ

More specifically, a policy of interreligion which claims biblical support must answer the question, How are we to speak about a "unique" and "once-for-all" revelation in Christ? If this means that God's active self-disclosing relationship to men came to an end in Jesus Christ, it is difficult to accept. If God is one who sought repeatedly to reveal himself to successive generations and centuries of men in Palestine; and if God is eternal and universal as well as Living Being; and if *to be* involves by nature for such Being *to communicate;* then the belief in a full and final (in the sense of *utterly discontinuous*) revelation at one point in history is open to serious question. This judgment is further supported by the conception of the revealing Christ as the eternal "Word" of God, which was in the beginning with God and *was God,* the Light that enlightens everyman (John 1:1–9).[2]

We may say, then, that the New Testament understanding

of the "once-for-all" character of God's self-disclosure in Christ is best preserved in terms of *depth* rather than *finality*.[3] And this seems to take us beyond the either/or choice of *kind* versus *degree* of revelation, beyond the choice between "special" and "general" revelation (that is, between the particular revelation in Jesus Christ and any general manifestation of God in nature and human history). The revelation in Christ was and is once for all, decisive *for those who have come to know him*. But who will presume to limit the divine intent and power by saying that this revelation cannot be partially reflected elsewhere, or that in it lies the totality of truth without remainder? The committed Christian may declare that the revelation in Christ is unique because of the incomparable depth of God's fatherly concern and sacrificial love which he finds there. Christ is therefore irreplaceable for the Christian. It is conceivable that God has not so revealed *these aspects* of his nature elsewhere so clearly and dramatically. It is also conceivable that a God of such character would disclose authentically *something* of himself in other cultures of mankind. All that a Christian can say is what is involved in his own Christian commitment and that he has as yet found no equal of Jesus Christ in non-Christian faiths; he can *not* know whether this corresponds to a fact in the objective order of things or whether it reflects his too preliminary acquaintance with other religions. This suggests that the Christian's encounter with other religions will not be guaranteed against religious risk, that the Christian is not invulnerable in today's world.

Reflections of Current Theology

The appeal to theological authority in developing a policy of interreligious affairs has thus far brought to light the point of departure in a particular concept of revelation and the

biblical grounding of such a concept. The discussion must now become more concrete in showing some characteristic features of the genuinely open and constructive relationship to non-Christian religions for which theological sanction is being claimed. A strong correlation will be seen again between theological and "circumstantial" authority in that the pattern of *confrontation in vulnerability* aptly expresses a spirit which is common to these features.

Despite the many legitimate doubts that may be expressed about theological formulations as awkward and tentative attempts to communicate about revelation, we cannot do without theology; nor can any policy on interreligious affairs which covets a measure of theological authority ignore or fly in the face of contemporary theological insights and patterns. Three patterns which are especially relevant are (a) personal encounter, (b) community, and (c) the nature of human selfhood.

a. *Personal Encounter*

Anyone who has become familiar with recent theology will recognize the phrase "personal encounter." It is rightly used to characterize the classic pattern of Hebrew-Christian awareness of the Living God. The situation of personal encounter is the paradoxical moment of revelation when God's being and will are disclosed and shrouded in mystery. So it was in the high moments and events of the biblical story. Revelation of God was received by persons in history, transmitted via persons to a people and to mankind in the midst of history. And the factor of vulnerability is present in a significant way in this process: those persons who are most deeply aware of the revelation are also most vulnerable, most subject to the transforming impact of the revelation upon their own thought and devotion and life: they are incapable of controlling or pre-

scribing limits and modes within which divine disclosure will occur.

What needs to be seen more clearly is that this theology of personal encounter, this "relational theology" which takes its start from a personal relationship of the divine and the human, has implications for interreligious relationships. As revelation is "known," received, and appropriated in our own tradition in moments of deep awareness of personal confrontation (recall Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul), no other setting than personal encounter is adequate for its communication and transmission. Nor is any other context likely to be serviceable to the Christian for apprehending whatever revelation is available in other traditions.

There are several levels on which interreligious personal encounter may occur as the human context for revelation and mediation of revelation: the human level, the intellectual level, and the confessional level. On the strictly human level the primary motive of mutuality will be defined by the common humanity of the persons involved. It will be defined by peculiar traits of temperament, skills, tastes, just as in our ordinary associations. We establish close and warm mutual relationships and share confidence with certain persons who for any number of reasons "draw" us toward them: they value and appreciate much the same things as we do, our interests coincide, they elicit our admiration for being as they are. It is in such a context of genuine mutuality that deeper and more authentic communication may begin to take place. A Muslim *friend*, for example, will disclose to me (perhaps only indirectly) more of "Muslimness" than a book on Islam, more of what it really means and what it really involves to confess and to live by belief in Allah as the One True God.[4]

On the intellectual level the motive for personal encounter is that high kind of curiosity, that yearning to know and

understand which is indispensable to learning. At this level we come into mutual relationships with individuals of other cultures and faiths because we are genuinely interested in the beliefs and practices peculiar to them. This level of encounter may or may not overlap with the first: our mutuality and communication may not take on the warmer tones and feelings of personal attraction and friendship. We may remain more distant from one another and still be animated by a genuine respect for the other persons and for their venerable traditions. And much information and understanding and insight may be gained in this way. Limited but fruitful encounter takes place at this level for some on college and university campuses and for a few in hospitals and research centers, where many foreign nationals are in training in this country. On a more highly organized basis it is promoted by the conferences and seminars of such groups as the American Friends Service Committee, the American Friends of the Middle East, and others. These intercultural and interreligious contacts through personal relationships should become part of a coherent policy of interreligion; they should be carefully expanded to increase the incidence of personal encounter at the intellectual level.

Finally, the level of confession would ideally include all three levels of personal encounter. Here the full depth and richness of persons and of religious awareness may be reached. In mutual respect persons of different religious experience and traditions learn and gain insight into the experience and traditions of others. In mutual friendship they may open their confidence to one another, revealing dimensions of their awareness and experience which are not normally accessible to the level of inquiry alone. In this setting of security born of freedom and mutual acceptance the profoundest wellsprings of personal faith and commitment may be drawn

upon. Faith may cry unto faith in witness to, in confession and sharing of, ultimate and overriding concern. Critical inquiry and honest examination can take place at this level without the crippling results of resentment and suspicion.

Confrontation, encounter in vulnerability at the confessional level, has seldom reached formal or institutional form. One actual instance is the Christian hostel established and directed by the long-time missionary and scholar Karl Ludwig Reichelt. Here at *Tao Fong Shan* near Hong Kong a place was provided for Christians and Buddhists, Confucians and Taoists to meet on the level of inquiry and perhaps to move on to the levels of friendly and confessional mutuality.[5]

There are a great number of opportunities for this kind of encounter, however, because of increasing personal contact with representatives of non-Christian faith. Where in our grandfather's day the chief source of knowledge of other religions and ways of life was through travelers' tales and great scholarly compilations of facts and phenomena, in our day books of historical and descriptive sketches are for many of us only a prelude to exposure to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists themselves. Our centers of higher education and educational foundations reflect these changes. Buddhist scholars are frequently in residence at the University of Chicago. Harvard University has established a Center for the Study of World Religions; it is a residential meeting place for devotees and scholars of many world faiths where person-to-person conversation as well as rigorous study can take place. McGill University in Canada has recently established an advanced Institute of Islamic Studies in which approximately 50 per cent of faculty and students are professed Muslims. If we are to know Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism, we must become acquainted with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists directly. Only in this setting are Christians likely to penetrate the symbol-

ism through which religions express their deepest and fullest understandings of reality (see the closing paragraphs of Chapter 4). This can hardly be achieved unless those who are strangers to the symbolic representations of a religion—in mythology and the various art forms—enjoy prolonged direct relationship with those who live by that religion.

These and other opportunities for personal interreligious contact speak in direct and fundamental ways to the need for communication among religions. The potential fruitfulness of these developments for our own purposes is suggested by one of America's leading theologians of the ecumenical movement, W. M. Horton. He recalls an experience of fellowship with a Buddhist in Japan. Despite the clear differences in conceptions and formulation between the self-discipline of Buddhist sainthood and the acceptance of divine grace toward Christian sainthood, Professor Horton reported that "when I talked with the priest . . . that gulf was not there. Differences of tradition seemed to vanish between us . . . and our souls met in something less tangible and definable than forms of speech and thought, but infinitely more real and authoritative."[6]

To put this in perhaps its simplest and sharpest terms: knowing a religion cannot be complete without knowing persons who live in and by that religion. Religion is nothing if it is not personal involvement in an awareness of transcendent realities and of the possibilities of human destiny.

What is essential in all these efforts is that we recognize the need and value of such occasions of direct and personal confrontation in mutuality and that we take the initiative in establishing open and constructive relationships wherever feasible. Opportunities may be cultivated in individual homes and need not take on elaborate organizational form.[7] Yet the seriousness of the undertaking demands that these encounters

should be arranged with utmost care. No effort should be spared in enlisting the interest and dedicated participation of the best trained personnel available. The facilities and personnel of colleges and universities should be utilized as fully as possible, wherever the spirit of confrontation in openness can be sincerely and honestly embraced.

It is equally essential that we ask whether fruitful communication can take place without a lively sense of one's human or intellectual or confessional vulnerability. If human relations in which the parties insist on establishing their own *in*vulnerability are static and sterile, and if the intellectual enterprise is a fraud when participants in the encounter cannot acknowledge vulnerability in their own positions, can confessional encounter have any meaning apart from confrontation in vulnerability? This is not to say that these relationships may be looked upon as a one-way street which we enter at the price of subtraction and surrender. The place of confrontation in vulnerability is where men of different faith meet in acceptance of the possibility that they may be led eventually into deeper and fuller reaches of truth. Over twenty years ago A. G. Hogg, a missionary of distinguished service in India, looked forward to this possibility. Suggesting that we consider the Christian attitude toward non-Christian *faith* rather than faiths, he asked whether "in non-Christian faith [we may] meet with something that is not merely a seeking but in a real measure a finding, and a finding by contact with which a Christian may be helped to make fresh discoveries in his finding of God *in Christ*."[8]

b. *Community*

Another theme which has become prominent in theological circles and which should find a place in interreligious policy is "community." From the biblical center of Christian

faith are heard today echoes and strains of what is called in the New Testament *koinonia*. Some of these strains, to be sure, are faint or distorted. As every valued and authentic original is debased and devalued through mass production, so *koinonia* has often become in the modern religious economy the debased coin of sentimental togetherness and friendly fellowship. Yet in its genuine form this conception must play a role in meeting the problems at hand. If there is one value of Christian faith and experience which ought to be made universally relevant it is this one. In a day when men clutch at every type of human association which holds some promise of answering their need for personal and suprapersonal acceptance and relatedness, the worshiping Christian community must not withhold one of its greatest gifts. If it would be true to its discipleship and apostleship its treasures must be shared now more than ever.

Immediately questions arise: can we really share this *koinonia*, this open acceptance and loving concern for one another with those outside our own confession? Can this sense of the blessed community cross the dividing lines of culture and creed and become available to "outsiders," to those who do not stand under the judgment as well as before the promise of him who is Lord of this community? This is admittedly a difficult and important question. We may have to be content with sharing a replica with those beyond the Christian family. The genuine and complete community of New Testament experience centers around a living relationship of all members with their Lord in trusting faith and loving obedience. Authentic Christian *koinonia* requires reciprocal horizontal relationships which are fed and nourished by a vertical relationship with God in Christ. Yet this fact cannot justify a withholding of *koinonia*, a refusal to extend it as far as possible beyond the confessing Christian

community. If an authentic original cannot be reproduced in all its power and vitality, this is not a sufficient reason for refusing to make available replicas of the highest quality. Refusal to witness to the relatedness in love and acceptance which is the gift of God in Christ is to fail to fulfill the law of Christ, self-giving love for the neighbor.

In other words, the blessings of Christian faith and life are demands as well as gifts. Like fire they live by giving themselves away; they must be shared. There is no legitimate limitation to the diameter of the circle within which sharing the things of God takes place. Jesus insisted that not even the enemy, let alone the neighbor, is outside the pale of love and self-giving concern.[9]

c. *The Nature of Human Selfhood*

The appeal to theological authority by the appropriation of contemporary theological insights must focus finally on the question of human existence itself. Matters of self-understanding and the analysis of the human situation have been central concerns of modern Protestant theology, thanks to the combined impact of world events and existentialist philosophy and psychology. The question of *the meaning of existing as a human being* is recognized today more widely than ever as a fundamentally religious and theological question. Therefore we need to ask whether our understanding of man and of ourselves *as selves* offers any clue to our relations with other faith communities.

We need to inquire into what man is, what is indispensable to being human. A full-scale effort to answer this question requires its own title and publisher. One or two suggestions can be made, however, with particular relevance to interreligious affairs: Whatever else may be said about man as man, he has freedom; whatever else may be affirmed or denied

as elements of human nature, self-transcendence cannot be denied.

The hoary debate over free will versus determinism may go on forever. But the limitations upon man's inherent freedom which must be acknowledged cannot do away with the inescapable sense of being significantly free. Erich Fromm has written tellingly of man's efforts at *Escape from Freedom*. Existentialist dramatists and poets, theologians and philosophers mirror in darker shades and in bolder strokes our own experience of the painful freedom that underlies decisions and choices. Akin to this freedom of will and choice which marks man for both glory and misery is what has been called self-awareness or self-transcendence. Reinhold Niebuhr has spoken of "self-transcendence in infinite regression" as a distinguishing characteristic of human nature: man has the capacity to stand apart from himself spiritually, examine, and evaluate himself—he can be both *subject* who inspects and judges and *object* of his own inspection and judgment; then another step of spiritual self-transcendence can be taken to examine the point of view and attitudes from which the first self-examination was made. I may decide, for example, as a productive member of the affluent society to organize my trip abroad around doing the smart spots of the Mediterranean; but I may criticize and reject this choice when I realize that for the same expenditure in time and money I could visit the Holy Land, learning firsthand the terrible plight of the million unsettled Arab refugees and what must be done to help them; in still another moment of reflection I am free to inquire into my real motive for visiting the Holy Land—is it genuine religious interest and moral concern, or is it a self-centered desire for prestige with a certain circle of persons? And so on and on—"in infinite regression." Such capacities for self-transcendence are distinctively human.[10]

If it be granted that self-transcendence—the freedom

within the person by which self-examination and evaluation and commitment take place—is essential to our very humanity, can it offer guidance in the problems of interreligion? Some will contend that it cannot: "It is one thing to stand off from and evaluate our own actions and attitudes in most areas of life, but quite another to transcend or stand free from our ultimate loyalty and scrutinize it. To attempt the latter is to say that one is equal to if not superior to God, who must be examined and evaluated from our vantage point of transcendence. This is blasphemous!"

It may also be contended with some realism if not with decisive accuracy that self-transcendence in this sphere is too difficult, even if it is not religiously and theologically bad: "It is expecting the impossible to ask the devotees of any tradition to stand clear of that very reality by which they live. One may as well ask the seaman in a storm to release his grip on the rudder in order to step away to evaluate its merits alongside other styles of rudders."

In reply to these criticisms of self-transcendence as a guide in the question of interreligious efforts it must be said that the first point is wrongly placed. It mistakes the reality to be transcended. In so doing it exposes some questionable assumptions about the nature of the religious life, that is, of faith; for the objection takes its point of departure in the false impression that God is to be transcended. And if that were being proposed it would deserve the charge of blasphemy. On the contrary, what is to be transcended is not God but the formless images of our human conception and traditions about God. The act of *religious* self-transcendence is not at all concerned with blasphemous attempts to assert equality with God: it is concerned with a momentary freedom from the products of the self's interaction with both God and the world—in other words, with ways of theological

understanding. It is from these (not from God) that one stands free in the supreme moment of self-transcendence, the moment of faith: the free decision of loyalty and commitment is made not to an *idea* of God but to God himself. It is from ideas of God that one stands free in the operations of genuine interreligious mutuality. And as one is still oneself (rather, *supremely* oneself) in the act of self-transcendence, one may remain a Christian or Jew or Muslim even as one stands free of one's Christianity or Judaism or Islam. Thus, the spiritual exercise of self-transcendence is essential not only to our humanity; it is a basic structure of authentic faith and self-commitment; and as such it must be relevant to the possibilities of personal interreligious encounter.

An analogy may be drawn once more from international relations to point up more sharply the relevance of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is desperately needed to restore anything like a vibrant hope that the conflict and rivalry among nations can be held within bounds and turned into constructive channels. There is needed in the international as in the interreligious realm that freedom in dialogue for which the great Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber continues to write and speak. This commanding figure in the world of thought has long been a leader of the *Ichud* (Unity) party in Israeli politics; he has engaged in persistent efforts to bring Arab and Jew together as coworkers in building a new life in the land of their fathers. Buber continues to work for that self-transcending dialogue where in the midst of injustice and rivalry persons and peoples will confront one another *as persons and peoples* to speak openly to one another. He calls men and nations to break through the curtains of fear and suspicion and mistrust, to enter into a covenant of peace where no easy harmony or resolution of differences is expected but where

differences are affirmed and used as stimuli toward discovering and achieving the largest possible measure of justice.

Is this not the paradigm or model by which we must proceed in the perplexing realm of religious rivalry and conflict? Nothing less than a self-transcending venture in religious vulnerability holds promise of community without compromise—*although not without risk of compromise*. As Buber has never renounced his Jewish heritage, acknowledging his standing ground on one side of the conflict even as he strives for genuine "meeting" and "dialogue" between Jews and Arabs estranged from each other, so we must seek to communicate directly and personally with those whose most sacred loyalty is other than our own.

In reply to the complaint that self-transcendence in our religious life is expecting too much or is unrealistic, one can only ask, "What then is the religious life itself if not an 'asking too much'?" The act of standing apart from one's own cherished tradition and its formulations of religious awareness may be painful. So is the act of self-giving love deadly difficult and the act of self-giving and self-entrusting faith. Yet with a kind of divine madness, a mixture of short-term folly and long-term realism, our Christian commitment demands these things. Furthermore, the fact that all these acts of selfhood are fundamentally the same act, humanly speaking, offers the hope that self-transcendence in the interreligious community is thoroughly possible. We are called to psychological self-transcendence in freedom by our humanity; our religious life is empty and false without the self-transcendence of love and faith in response to the divine gift and promise and demand.

May it not also be that the God who gives us our humanity and elicits our love and trust is also calling us to the attitudes and acts of confessional self-transcendence? Is it not an authentic act of commitment to entrust one's religious conceptions to him whom we declare their Author? This is no

attempt to deny our limitations and particular traditions or confessions any more than Buber's labor for a genuine covenant of mutuality and peace involves forsaking his Jewishness. Rather it is an *affirmation* in joy and expectation of both our own perspectives and the limitedness of our perspectives. It is an affirmation in joy for what has been revealed to us, and in expectation of what may yet be shown to us and to all men who have ears to hear and eyes to see. It is taking seriously in the present context Luther's cry, "Let God be God!"—both as we have known him in his self-disclosure and not known him in his hiddenness, as we have spoken to him in prayer and of him in teaching, and as we may yet speak with and about him in words now alien or unknown to us.

If such a policy in matters of interreligion is to be worked out it will require us to put aside the notion that we can in this realm "negotiate from positions of strength." *We must combine witness with exploration within an awareness of vulnerability.* What we are seeking to do is almost as old as human thought itself: to evolve a policy, to steer a course between two extremes on which disaster is writ large. We would proceed not claiming to be free of presuppositions and commitments, but renouncing the presuppositions of idealistic "essentialism" and of distorted biblicism. What we presuppose is that the claims of man's living religions to ultimate truth must be critically but sympathetically entertained in the living context of personal confrontation. What we are committed to is the fullness of God's self-disclosure in Christ and the power and purpose of the One True God to draw all men into reconciliation with himself and with one another. And it is precisely in this commitment that we may find the highest sanction for accepting and affirming vulnerability. *For the fullness of God's self-disclosure and the power and purpose revealed therein cannot be separated from God's*

making himself vulnerable in becoming man—incarnation—and in freely suffering death on a cross—crucifixion.

* * *

It is not an absence of faith which prompts such a policy. It is rather the presence of faith—a faith which shuns indifference and compromise on the one side and scorns the false security of claims to incomparability on the other. It is a faith which is eager to witness and to hear, inoffensive in its openness. The offense that attaches to the good news of God-become-man is inherent in the Christian message; but it must not be burdened with an *instrumental* offense born of theological narrowness if it would speak of him who though Lord of all gives himself to all in love. It is a faith that shows itself alive in that it is lived: if there be in it for others any of the wonder and "superiority" which we find in it for ourselves, this must be confessed and demonstrated in humility, not asserted or claimed (even in humility!). Faith must give birth to deed. The actions that speak louder than words will test whether our faith be truly represented by our confession. And these actions will surely include concrete steps to initiate direct and personal encounters, meetings in dialogue among men of different religions, confrontation in vulnerability.

These proposals are meant not as an experiment but as a commitment. They are a venturing far out in full involvement: there is nothing tentative about them. We shall be launched into seas not fully charted toward a destination only dimly known. We *choose* a course which seems rather to be *forced* upon us by the total situation in which we find ourselves: our devotion to truth and our commitment in faith to the seeking and revealing God who is its source; and our recognition of the desperate threat to our spiritual humanity and to the civilization it has built require the most open and

genuine communication among persons and peoples of conflicting traditions. It is by such a course that we may pursue with hope the goal of community without compromise.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. A significant implication of this view is that the discussion of the rebirth of world religions in Chapters 1 and 2 is at best incomplete. Neither nationalism nor Christian challenge suffices to explain the source of their new life: the possibility was cited as long ago as 1928 by an Indian Christian, P. Chenchiah, that renascent Hinduism is a silent reminder of God's action in the world.

2. The view that the concept of Logos or eternal Word of God is a profoundly significant link between Christianity and other religions has an ancient and honorable history. Systematic exposition of this thesis is found in A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions* "The Library of Constructive Theology" (London: James Nisbet & Company, Limited, 1958), Chapter VI. A no less systematic attempt to discredit this view is made by Kraemer in *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), Chapters VII and XVI.

3. Comparable views are expressed by H. H. Farmer in *The Authority of the Faith* I, "The Madras Series" (New York: International Missionary Council, 1939), pp. 150 ff, and by D. G. Moses, *Religious Truth and the Relation Between Religions* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1950), pp. 133 f.

4. A more complete statement of this point of view is found in W. C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?", *The History of Religions*, M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

5. Under the direction of R. P. Kraemers the hostel has become a Christian Study Center of Chinese culture and religions. Non-Christians, however, are still welcomed there. This and a second center in Burma and a third in India are sponsored by the World

Council of Churches. They are making a significant attempt to reach authentic understanding of Asian ways of faith and life by studying them on their home ground. One of the purposes of the present chapter is to outline some ways in which predominantly intellectual and academic efforts of this kind need supplementation.

6. *The Authority of the Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 138.

7. One of the special virtues of Kraemer's latest book, *World Cultures and World Religions*, is that the expert who wrote it realizes that the interfaith confrontation now in process will take place predominantly not among experts but among the interested—"vaguely informed, vaguely ignorant." (See pp. 358, 360, 365 f.)

8. *The Authority of the Faith* (*op. cit.*), p. 95.

9. Kraemer's *World Cultures and World Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960) came into the author's hands when the manuscript for this book was being retyped for the press. It is highly encouraging to find in it Kraemer's most extensive and explicit statement of the necessity of dialogue and "multilogue" of religions as one way of contributing to cultural understanding and world peace. He speaks there in terms which are identical with many used in the present chapter: "The fundamental aim [of interreligious relations] directly involves this open exchange of witness, experience, cross-questioning and listening. The seriousness of true religion . . . need not hinder participants from being open to new insights through the instrumentality of contact with one another." He goes so far as to speak of "a sincere and open dialogue with the non-Christian religions." "Teachableness is as necessary as firmness." (Pp. 356, 365, 369). One can only earnestly hope with Kraemer that "if strength and life are accorded to him" he will write separate books on the terms of Christianity's dialogue with the various world religions in the spirit of his latest thinking.

10. A full treatment of the capacity of self-transcendence as a dominant aspect of human personhood is found in Volume One of Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New

York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942–1943). An illuminating discussion of the nature of religion which draws extensively from Niebuhr and other contemporary theologians is the first chapter in *Ways of Faith*, by J. Hutchison and J. Martin, Jr., second edition (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1960).

ADDITIONAL READING

A penetrating discussion of the nature of community from a Christian standpoint is C. A. Holbrook, *Faith and Community: A Christian Existential Approach* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), Chapter VI.

Systematic theological analyses of Christianity's encounter with world religions are rare. Two are of major importance: E. C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953); and the Gifford Lectures of H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London: James Nisbet & Company, Limited, 1954).

Still valuable after twenty years as a cross section of theological opinion is a volume of essays already referred to in the notes, *The Authority of the Faith*. A newer and larger collection has been edited by Gerald Anderson under the title, *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961).

Two articles which came into the writer's hands after this book was completed and which are remarkably close to the point of view expressed here are Douglas V. Steere, "Mutual Radiation," *Religion in Life* (Summer, 1959), pp. 395–405; and W. C. Smith, "Christianity's Third Great Challenge," *The Christian Century*, April 27, 1960.

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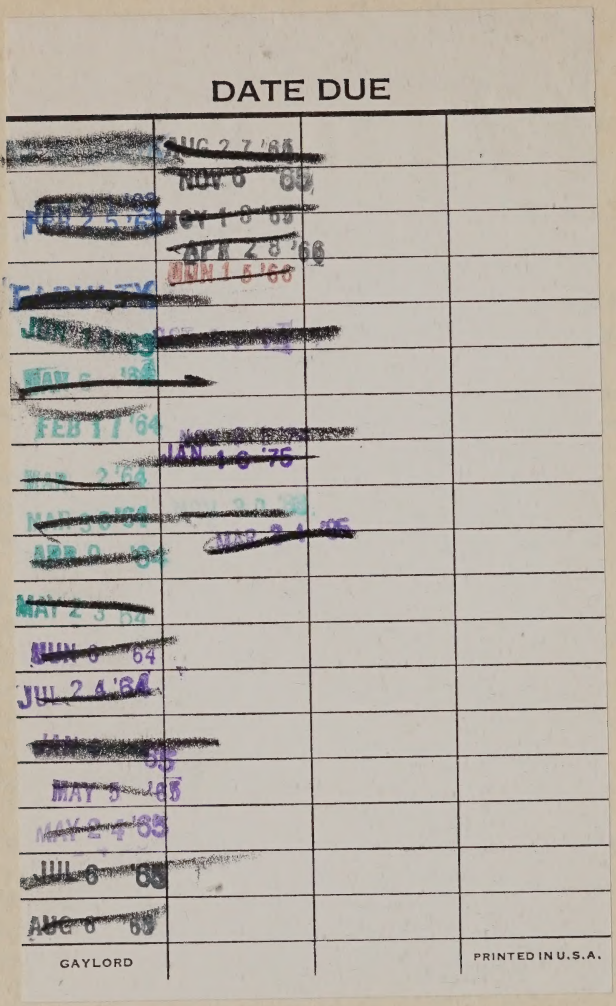
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